

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 15: 29-33

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 15. We will read verses 29-33 today.

Paul wrote Romans just as he was preparing for his fifth trip to Jerusalem. The funds he had collected from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia were to help the poor saints in the Jerusalem church. Paul's heavenly financial logic was very special: saints owe the debt of the gospel to their unbelieving relatives and friends and must preach the gospel to them to repay the debt; saints owe the debt of material things to those who minister to them spiritually and must meet their daily needs to repay the debt.

At the same time, Paul handled financial matters very cautiously, completely transparently and openly. He wanted to personally oversee this matter and complete it before he could visit the Roman church. And he wanted to be sent by the Roman church to Spain, according to Jesus Christ's charge, to preach the gospel to the end of the earth known at that time.

Verse 29: "But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ."

Paul wrote Romans before going to Jerusalem. Paul was certain that when he went to Rome, he would surely come with the fullness of Christ's blessing; this was Paul's consistent boldness. He did not know what would happen, but he was full of faith in God. Of course, Paul did eventually go to Rome, but not in the normal way; he went to Rome like a prisoner, in chains. This may not have been what Paul originally expected, but he did indeed come full of Christ's grace.

Under God's sovereign authority, Paul's fifth trip to Jerusalem sparked a riot. In the riot, Paul was arrested. Afterward, when there was no way out, he had to use his Roman citizenship to appeal to Caesar; only then was he sent in chains to Rome. Later, Paul was imprisoned in Rome for two years, so in total, for four years Paul was not free in his movements, experiencing many sufferings, yet always experiencing God's salvation in the most critical moments. Through these experiences of suffering, he gained new light and revelation concerning the truth of Christ.

During his imprisonment in Rome, he wrote four prison epistles, which became the peak of his lifelong ministry. These four epistles are also the highest revelation concerning Christ and the church: Colossians speaks of Christ as the Head of the church; Ephesians speaks of the church as Christ's Body; Philippians speaks of the experience of Christ and the church; and Philemon is the sweetest testimony of Christ and the church. Indeed, Paul came with abundant grace; he not only helped the Roman church at that time but also, through his prison epistles, blessed all the churches for the next two thousand years.

Verse 30: "Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me."

Paul was a great apostle; ordinary saints would think that God would keep and bless him in all things so that he lacked nothing. Yet Paul tells us that he is joined to the church and needs the saints in the church to pray for him. Even when writing to the Roman church that he had not yet visited, he requested the saints to pray for him.

In his request and exhortation, he manifests his high knowledge and experience of the Triune God. "Brethren, I beg you through our Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me." Paul himself strived with all his heart to serve the church and the saints; he exhorted the saints in the Roman church to strive with all their heart, just like him, in praying for him to God.

Paul perfectly presents before us the relationship that should exist between the one who serves and those who are served. The one who serves must strive with all his heart, through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to serve the saints. The Lord Jesus Christ is the pattern of his service, and in his service the Lord reigns; the love from the Spirit is the motive of his service.

God in His wisdom placed the four Gospels at the beginning of the New Testament, completely introducing how Jesus Christ, when ministering on earth, served people; this is to be the pattern for every one who serves.

When the one who serves reaches the point where his strength is insufficient, he must draw from the Spirit the motive and power of love to continue his service. Therefore, on one hand, the one who serves strives with all his heart to serve people; on the other hand, those who are served must also strive with all their heart to pray for the one who serves to God. Even a great apostle like Paul encounters difficulties and needs the saints to pray for him to God.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is the time for us to reflect: Do we often remember the saints in the church who serve us? Is there any lack in praying for them? The intimate relationship between saints in the church is built upon intercession for one another; especially we must intercede for those saints who serve us, and strive with all our heart in intercession, so that those who serve can fulfill their ministry through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit. Next, Paul very directly mentions three things for which he needs the Roman saints to intercede.

Verse 31: “that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints.”

The first thing Paul needed them to intercede for was that he might be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe. During Paul's third missionary journey, when he stayed in Ephesus for two years and trained coworkers in the school of Tyrannus, the gospel ministry had great effect. To the point that in the city of

Ephesus, those who did business with the temple of Artemis lost their opportunity to make money; they gathered a mob to riot and wanted to seize Paul.

After the riot calmed down, Paul left Ephesus. In Acts 20:1–3 it is recorded: “After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia. Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.”

The three months Paul spent in Greece were in Corinth, and there he wrote Romans. Afterward, he was about to sail through Syria to Jerusalem; at that time the Jews plotted to kill Paul. These Jews followed Paul all the way and finally reached Jerusalem, so Paul knew that his journey to Jerusalem would not be smooth.

Paul therefore took a detour, first going to Macedonia, then from Macedonia to Troas. When passing Miletus, he specially called the elders of the Ephesian church to meet him and charged them to be careful for the whole flock and shepherd God’s church. The elders knew that Paul was going to Jerusalem with the mind of a martyr, thinking they would never see him again; therefore, when everyone finally knelt down to pray, they wept and embraced Paul’s neck and kissed him.

Later, Paul traveled by sea and landed at Tyre, staying with the disciples for seven days. The disciples, moved by the Spirit, also urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Yet Paul, facing Jerusalem with resolute heart, left Tyre and came to Caesarea, staying in the house of Philip the evangelist.

The prophet Agabus and Philip repeatedly urged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Paul had to express his heart: for the name of the Lord Jesus, he was willing not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem. Paul thus stopped everyone’s mouths and came to Jerusalem.

When Paul wrote Romans, he was moved by the Holy Spirit and knew there would be danger in going to Jerusalem; therefore he specially requested the Roman

church saints to pray for him. He could not but go to Jerusalem, but he asked God to keep him so that he could be delivered from those Jews who wanted to kill him.

Later, God indeed heard the Roman church's intercession for Paul, using a Roman commander to first snatch Paul from the rioting Jews and bring him into the Roman barracks. Afterward, hearing that more than forty men had sworn not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul, the commander dispatched heavy troops to protect Paul and escort him to Caesarea, handing him over to the Roman governor. Paul encountered danger several times and nearly lost his life, yet he was miraculously saved each time; this was God hearing the Roman church's intercession for Paul.

The second thing Paul requested intercession for was that the offering he handled for the Jerusalem church might be acceptable to the saints. Paul, in order to ease relations with the Jerusalem church, specially collected funds from the Gentile churches to help the poor there. He hoped this loving supply could bring proper fellowship and resolve the issue of whether to observe the Old Testament ceremonial law.

It is noteworthy that the funds Paul brought were probably not small, yet in the record of Acts, it is completely unmentioned. Acts 21:18–20 records: “The following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord.”

After Paul met the elders of the Jerusalem church, he greeted them and described God's work among the Gentile churches. By normal reasoning, this should have been the time when Paul handed over the funds to the elders as evidence of the Gentile saints' remembrance of the Jewish saints. The elders heard it and glorified God; perhaps part of it was for the love of the Gentile churches. But the elders' next words should have been beyond Paul's expectation; Paul simply had no opportunity to discuss the issue of whether to observe the ceremonial law. It turns out that the elders of the Jerusalem church had long ago decided for Paul.

In Acts 21:20–24, the elders said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they

have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. What then? The assembly will certainly hear that you have come. Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law."

I have some confidence that James and the elders had long planned to use Paul to personally lead in performing the purification rite to calm the Jews' accusations against Paul. That is to say, the Jerusalem church had already decided they would not conflict with the Jewish Sanhedrin; they would still observe the Old Testament ceremonial law and designed a way that Paul could hardly refuse—having Paul personally lead in performing the purification rite to calm the Jews' dissatisfaction with Paul.

James and the other elders may have had good intentions, and Paul's compromise in this matter may also have been to maintain a channel of fellowship. But this matter the Holy Spirit did not allow. If Paul had led in performing the purification rite in Jerusalem, how would those who received the New Testament truth revealed through Paul view it? Therefore, the Holy Spirit did not allow Paul to complete the purification rite and allowed a riot to occur.

Of course, in this riot, Paul suffered much; several times he nearly lost his life. But God preserved Paul's life. The Holy Spirit also allowed Paul to have no freedom for the next four years, giving the usually busy Paul much time for reflection. Only then could Paul, in the prison epistles, write the highest and most complete revelation God gave concerning Christ and the church.

The offering Paul brought was accepted, but the purpose Paul wanted to achieve through the offering was not accomplished. Because God was willing for His heavily used apostle to go through suffering and reflection to receive the most complete truth. At the same time, we see that the Jerusalem church had completely

compromised with the Jewish Sanhedrin; if this church had continued to exist, it would cause people to think the church was a branch of Judaism, blurring the truth of the New Testament.

Therefore, God also allowed, thirteen years later, in AD 70, the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem. Not only were the Jews scattered among the nations, but the Jerusalem church also disappeared from the stage of history. From that time on, the Jews were no longer a problem for the church.

Verse 32: “that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.”

The third thing Paul requested intercession for was that Paul might come to Rome according to God's will, with joy, and be refreshed together with the saints. At this time, Paul still did not know that so many things would happen when he went to Jerusalem, causing him to suffer much. But he was one who knew God; he did not pray according to his own will but asked the Roman saints to pray for him; rather that he might submit to God's will. No matter how winding the path, no matter what kind of suffering he would encounter on the way, he only asked to submit to God's will.

God indeed heard the Roman church's intercession; when Paul was seized in Jerusalem, the Lord personally appeared to Paul. In Acts 23:11, “But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.’” Paul had the Lord's promise and indeed came to Rome with joy, in chains. Paul's journey to Rome was very winding, but he had the Lord's presence all the way.

He first testified gloriously before King Agrippa in Caesarea; on the way to Rome, he encountered a shipwreck, and God used Paul to save the 276 people on the ship. Later, on the island of Malta, because of Paul, all on the ship were treated kindly, and at the same time the gospel was brought to the natives on the island of Malta. Paul indeed came to Rome with joy and stayed there for two years; all who came

to him he received. Though his movements were not free, it brought out the peak of his ministry—the writing of those four prison epistles.

I believe that during those two years in the Roman prison, there must have been saints from the Roman church who visited him and had intimate fellowship with him. Paul was refreshed in prison, and the Roman church was also refreshed because of Paul's supply. According to church history records, after Paul was released from the Roman prison, he did go to Spain and completed the mission of preaching the gospel to the end of the earth.

Verse 33: "Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen."

God Himself is peace. Having God's presence means having peace; if the church has God's presence, it is a church of peace. The church can suffer but cannot lack peace; the church can be poor but cannot lack peace. A church decorated luxuriously, if it lacks peace, is not the church; a church praised by politics and business together, if it lacks peace, is not the church. Peace is the most basic characteristic of the church; peace is the result produced after experiencing grace. As long as the church experiences Christ's salvation, it can produce peace. May the churches where we all are be churches of peace.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, Paul's request for the Roman church to intercede for him is truly impressive. This is the relationship that should exist between the one who serves and those who are served. The one who serves, according to the leading of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, strives with all his heart to serve; and those who are served must also strive with all their heart to intercede for the one who serves, so that the church can produce the scene of peace. Paul truly set a beautiful example for us; he did not regard his own life, on one hand clarifying truth, on the other hand bringing fellowship among churches, and in all circumstances submitting to God's leading.

We know that in the last days, the church will also face many challenges; may God grant us wisdom to have the same spiritual insight as Paul, to boldly clarify truth

and seek fellowship in love, ultimately obtaining peace together with the saints. May God bless the church where I am and our church life; I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.