

a synopsis of ROMANS

When my co-workers found out that our Alaskan cruise had a day's layover in Seattle, they all said, *you have to go to Pike's Market*. If you travel south to Miami/Fort Lauderdale, you must explore the *Everglades*. If in Jackson Hole, *Grand Teton National Park* is a must see. If you fly to Norway, you have frittered away a great sight if you don't see the *Northern Lights*.

Somewhere between Paul's conversion and his preaching in Corinth, Greece, he was consumed with traveling to Italy and sharing the gospel in Rome—the capital of the Empire (Romans 1:10-12, 15). Rome was a fire in his belly. Rome was magnificent in its beauty (Pompey did much to adorn the city, and Augustus boasted that he had “found the city built of brick and left it built of marble”), but to Paul Rome was more than a scenic attraction. He saw this city of one million people (one inscription puts it over four million [Everett Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 280]) as the launchpad for taking the gospel to the region of Spain—perhaps beyond (Romans 15:23-29). The church at Rome was essential—a *must*—to the westward movement of the church.

If this was the fire in Paul's belly why didn't he just go to Rome and cast his vision to the church there? Why did he take the time to sit down in Corinth and write a lengthy letter to the church at Rome telling them that the same gospel that changed lives in the eastern churches can change lives in the western world too because it “is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16)? Why would he presumably entrust this *gospel treasure* to Phoebe from the near-by city of Cenchrea who is apparently making a trip to Rome (Romans 16:1-2)?

Here's the rest of the story. Before Paul went to Rome he left Corinth and headed to Jerusalem to deliver the offerings that had been received (Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8—9). He knew this was a dangerous undertaking, and he was not sure he would live to make a journey to Rome (Romans 15:31; Acts 20:22-23; 21:10-14, 30-32). If that were the case, Paul carefully laid out a plan to make sure the Gospel in all its beauty was recorded for all the world.

Paul did make it to Rome, but not to Spain. And the church, with a cross emblazoned on its heart, marched west to Spain—and England and the United States of America—carrying the message of the Gospel that changes the hearts of men and women like you and me. “So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

Now, that's good news, good news indeed!

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