

MBC - 6/5/2016 - Pastor Doug Thompson
“*Deo Volente*”
(People, Plans, and the Will of God)
Romans 15:23-33

In our study of Matthew’s Gospel, we are at the end of Matthew 20. Jesus is passing through Jericho, and on His way out of the city, a couple of blind beggars begin crying out for Him. The people with Jesus rebuke these poor guys, but they only cry out even louder: “*Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!*”

And Jesus, on His way to the cross - think about it, *on His way to the single greatest event in the history of the universe* - stops to talk to these men. He has pity on them. He touches them and heals them of their blindness. And then He continues on to Jerusalem with these men as part of the crowd, glorifying God.

As I was studying and praying this week, I just couldn’t get over that. Jesus was the most purposeful Man who ever lived and also the most compassionate Man who ever lived, and He managed to balance people and plans in His life: Nothing could deter Him from accomplishing His Father’s will and going to the cross - but He took the time to show mercy to these poor, blind beggars.

So we’re going to look at *that* story *next* week, but for this morning, I want us to look at another man who balanced people, plans, and the will of God, and that is the Apostle Paul. But let’s pray. . .

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- Romans 1:9-13 ⁹For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you ¹⁰always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you— ¹²that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine. ¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

Paul really wanted to visit the believers in Rome, but something had prevented him, and he waits until the end of the letter to tell them what it is—

- Romans 15:20-22 ²⁰and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, ²¹but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.” ²²This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you.

I.e., because Rome already had the Gospel, and his personal priority was to go to those who had never heard the gospel—

- Romans 15:23-33 ²³But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, ²⁴I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. ²⁶For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.

²⁷For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. ²⁸When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. ²⁹I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. ³⁰I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, ³¹that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³²so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. ³³May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Three things stand out as Paul's priorities: people, plans, and the will of God. He longs to see these brothers and sisters in Rome, face to face, and he prays about it constantly. But what Paul *wants* to do is subordinate to what God has called him to do - and that's very specific here, isn't it? This is a man who is guided by his plans and objectives.

But even his plans are subject to the sovereign will of God. He can overrule anything Paul plans. That's why Paul asks them to join with him in praying, "*so that by God's will I may come to you.*"

- Some of you old-timers remember the Ed Sullivan show. Used to watch it every Sunday night. A standard act on this show was the guys that kept plates spinning on sticks. The really good acts could keep a bunch of plates spinning on the sticks without any of them falling and breaking. The bad acts - used Tupperware . . .

Paul reminds me of those guys. He was without a doubt the most important Christian preacher, author, and church planter who ever lived. No one ever accomplished as much as Paul did, but he had to constantly balance these 3 priorities in his life: **people, plans, and the will of God**. We can see that in this passage in Romans. Sometimes they must have seemed to conflict with each other. But Paul never dropped a plate.

- Think about your own life right now: In your heart there are things you want to do for the Lord; you want to see lives change. So you make your plans - I know some of you are pursuing very specific ministry plans - so you schedule your time and mark up your calendar. But then an opportunity pops up to help a person in need—but that conflicts with your plans. And opportunities to help people seem endless. And what if God just steps in and changes your whole life situation - that's certainly happened to folks in our church family, hasn't it? Does it do any good to even make plans?

This morning I want us to see how we can balance these three factors in our own busy lives: people, plans, and the will of God. And we're going to begin with the factor that can trump everything else in our lives, and that is the sovereign will of God.

I. Our plans vs. God's plans.

- I have a friend who e-mails me about upcoming conferences and meetings, and if he is planning on attending, he always adds, "D.V." - the abbreviation of the Latin, *Deo Volente*, "God willing." I.e., "It's my plan to go, but I'll be there if it's God's plan!" Paul wrote *Deo Volente* after all of his plans. (Day'-OH VO-Len'-Tay)

The two passages we just read are full of detailed plans and intense desires, but twice Paul mentions God's will. And Paul knew that what was going to happen, ultimately, was - the sovereign will of God. Every one of Paul's plans could be changed or re-directed by God. But do

you notice any bitterness or cynicism in what Paul writes? None. Paul didn't resent God's sovereignty. It was his greatest joy. He cherished these Old Testament passages:

- Proverbs 19:21 ²¹Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.
- Isaiah 14:24 ²⁴The LORD of hosts has sworn: "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand,

We heard this from Nebuchadnezzar earlier in—

- Daniel 4:35 ³⁵all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and *He does according to his will* among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

God even sovereignly wills the salvation of His children—

- Ephesians 1:11 . . . having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works *all things* according to the counsel of *his will*,

Even when men plot evil, it is only what God wills to happen that will happen. Don't we see this in Jesus' crucifixion?

- Acts 4:27-28 ²⁷for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸to do whatever Your hand and Your plan had predestined to take place.

But that is true of everything - *everything* that happens because—

- Psalm 115:3 ³Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

Some people would say, "That's fatalism! God does what He wants regardless of what we want, so *que sera, sera*." You might as well just sit in a corner, turn out the lights and wait for 'the will of God.' I hear this all the time from people when they hear what the Bible teaches about God's sovereignty over all things. They resent God for being God! Paul rejoiced in God's will! Proverbs 16.9 had to be one of Paul's life verses - written out on a 3x5 card and taped onto the dashboard of his camel—

- Proverbs 16:9 ⁹The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.

What makes the difference between *resenting* God's will and *rejoicing* in God's will? *Your personal relationship with God!* People who don't know God hate the idea that He is in control of their lives! But when you know and love and worship the true God of the Bible, and delight in His wisdom and power, and His infinite love for His children - then the greatest news in the world is that He is in complete control! Right? No thing and no one can get in the way of what He wants! What He wants, He wills. He causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose! And nothing can stop Him.

Let me say it again: Your *response* to the will of God in your life is determined by your *relationship* with God. The way you are responding to circumstances in your life right now is determined by your relationship with God. Think about that. So how does this affect making plans?

For Paul, God's sovereignty didn't frustrate him, it freed him.

A. Freedom.

Pro.16:9 taught him that it was his *responsibility* to make his plans, knowing that *God* would control the outworking of those plans. *God*, his heavenly father, whom he could trust with every detail of his life! The God of Romans 8:28 would will only that which was for His glory and for Paul's good. So Paul was free to make his plans - what could go wrong?

- When our kids were young, they loved Chuck E. Cheese, and they would head straight for the room filled with plastic balls. I could tell them, "Go wild! You can jump and dive and do whatever you want, go crazy!" I could say that because it was just about impossible to get hurt. In that room they had freedom within boundaries.

And that's what God's sov. will was like for Paul: he had the freedom to do bold, risky things for the sake of the Gospel, because God had promised to cause all things to work together for good! What could go wrong? What could separate him from the love of Christ? He could make his plans knowing that God would guide his steps, and even if that meant trials, or even death, if it was all God, then it was all good!

And God did guide his steps—

- Acts 16:6-7 ⁶And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

Here's Paul giving his life to serve Christ, and he hits two roadblocks in a row! But Paul didn't waste time feeling sorry for himself and asking, "Why, why, God?" He just said, "It must be God, so it must be good. What up next Lord? I can't wait to see." And Luke tells us--

- Acts 16:8-10 ⁸So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

That sounds like a fair assumption! Paul made his plans, and God directed his steps.

*Maybe some of you complain that God isn't guiding you, but the fact is, you aren't making any plans. God guides moving objects! As Howard Hendricks used to say, "*Overcome initial inertia!*" As long as you make your plans prayerfully, and biblically, you have nothing to lose. God will either bring Himself glory by fulfilling your plans, or by changing them in a way that exceeds what you had planned. So go for it.

B. Humility.

But there is one condition in your planning, and we see it constantly in Paul: humility. Always end your plans with *Deo Volente*. This is what James says—

- James 4:13-16 ¹³Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— ¹⁴yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for

a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” ¹⁶As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

- Imagine a group of young millennial techies sitting at Peets Coffee in Santa Rosa, sipping latte’s and making their plans: “OK, so we’re all agreed to make as much money as we can over the next 3 years, then we will pool our money and buy as much land as we can in S.R., which is supposed to grow to 220,000 people by 2025. These people will need places to live, so we will build high-price apartments on this land, and by the time retirement rolls around, we’re rich!”

What would old James say if he walked in on their meeting? (“Where is my caramel macchiato?”) Well he wouldn’t condemn them for making plans. He might even praise them for being so strategic and doing their research. That’s what we should do. And the parable of the talents that we are going to see in Matthew 25, applies even to the way we as Christians handle our money. We should be investing our money—because it’s not ours, it’s God’s, and He told us not to sit on it.

The plans were great, but James would say, “Excuse me, but you’ve left out something critically important: God controls the universe, not you. So your plans are great, but for you to confidently assert your future is presumptuous. And even arrogant. Your life is like a vapor. You might all be gone tomorrow! Instead, you ought to say, *‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.’*”

- That’s just what James would tell us: “Make plans. Good plans, well-thought-out plans. And then at the bottom of the spreadsheet, write *‘Deo Volente.’*”

“If the Lord wills” makes all the difference: the difference between plans that honor God and plans that dishonor Him. So what is the balance between our plans and God’s plans? *God’s sovereignty doesn’t frustrate our plans, it frees us to make plans. But always sign off with “D.V.”*

II. Our plans vs. people’s needs.

When I read Paul’s letters I see a very clear life priority showing through. He might have said it like this: “on the way to pursuing my plans - which are in God’s hands - I will love, encourage, and edify as many people as I can along the way.”

- If we could ask Paul, “Paul, what comes first in your life, is it plans or people? Are you people-oriented or goal-oriented?” I think he would say, “It’s not one or the other! All of my plans are *about* loving and serving people. When I stick to my plans, that’s when people are best served.”

This is where we need balance: We all know people who are so fixated on their own schedules that never seem to have time to meet needs right in front of their faces. Even Pastors can be this way. But people are never the *obstacle* or the *interruption* to ministry, people *are* the ministry!

But we also know people who try to meet every need they hear about. And the irony is that when you do that neither God nor people are served very well. To be an effective servant of God we need to be priority-directed, not people-pressured. The reason is simple: people’s needs are endless--and your time and energies are not. So obviously God hasn’t called you to

meet every need. He wants you to meet some needs, certain needs, but not all. One of the most important lessons you and I can learn is: “Need does not constitute call!”

- Like the person who drops everything to talk on the phone for hours, listening to people vent their emotions and problems, and then they end up neglecting other God-given priorities, like their own family.
- Or like many pastors who think that they are loving and serving people by allowing people to take up so much time, talking and visiting, that they neglect their God-given priority of prayer and the Word of God. But it’s that time in prayer and the Word that will be the most loving and helpful thing to the greatest number of people!

Think with me about Jesus: It’s mind-boggling to think that the Son of God turned the world upside in only about 3½ years, yet, He never even left tiny little Palestine. But there was nothing haphazard about Jesus’ life--no wasted energy, no idle moments. He was on business for God, He lived, died, and rose again, according to schedule. Like a general plotting His course of battle, He lived strictly according to His plan.

- And yet, He still takes the time to stop and heal two blind beggars. He did that constantly. I can’t recall Jesus ever sending away a leper, or someone who asked to be healed. We read about the Disciples wanting to send the crowds away! But Jesus never did.

But Jesus didn’t meet every need, or heal every disease in Israel--there were plenty of sick people left for the Apostles to heal later in Acts. He didn’t cast out every demon. He spent time with many people, but He invested His best time with a limited number--12--and even within the 12, there were 3--James, John, and Peter--who got the best of the best. He was sensitive and compassionate to people - more than anyone who has ever lived, but He was never distracted or diverted from His Father’s will by people. People didn’t pressure Him or determine His priorities. It’s amazing to see how many times in the Gospels that Jesus said ‘no’ to people:

- In Jn.6: “Jesus, be our King!” No.
- “Jesus, show us a sign.” No.
- “Jesus, tell my sister to help me in the kitchen!” Nooo.
- Lk.8:38-39: The demoniac that Jesus delivered begged Him that he might accompany Him--he wanted to be a follower of Jesus!--but Jesus said, “No, go back to your home-town and tell them what happened to you.”
- Luke 4:42-43 ⁴²And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, ⁴³but he said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” i.e., “No!”

Jesus came to earth to love and serve people, and to do that, He couldn’t let people divert Him from His course. The same is true for you and me. We need to be people-sensitive, but not people-pressured:

“I would love to go to the movies with you guys tonight, but I can’t. . . I would love to be a part of one more Bible study, but I can’t. . . I would love to talk right now, but I can’t--my priorities won’t allow me to.” Let me give you a great example from Paul’s life—

- Acts 20:15-17 ¹⁵And sailing from there we came the following day opposite Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus. ¹⁶For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. [Paul loved the Christians in Ephesus, and they loved him. If he stopped there, he knew he wouldn’t be able to leave without spending a lot of time with them, and he couldn’t do that. But look at what he did--] ¹⁷Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

I.e., He called the elders together, and gave them a warm, fervent, loving, personal message to encourage them in their ministry to the church there. Paul balanced his priorities with his love for people!

We’ve talked about people and plans and God’s will, and now we want to see where these three came together.

III. The 2,000 mile detour.

- Romans 15:23-28 ²³But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, ²⁴I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. ²⁶For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. ²⁸When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.

After what Paul wrote in ch.1 the believers in Rome are probably getting a room ready for him. Then he comes to the end of the letter and says, “I really want to come . . . uh, after I make a trip to Jerusalem . . . oh, and then when I head off to preach the Gospel in Spain—I’ll try to see you . . . on the way.”

I.e., He loved these Roman believers, really wanted to finally meet them, but that wasn’t his top priority! His #1 priority was still to take the Gospel where Christ had never been known, and that meant *Spain* which was at that time a strategic country. But God had placed an urgent people-need at Paul’s feet, so he had to deal with it first and it meant making a 2,000 mile detour before he could visit Rome on the way to Spain.

It must have been a big, big deal to divert Paul from taking the Gospel to those who had never heard. So let me explain where Paul was going, and why—

Paul is writing Romans from Corinth which is in Achaia - modern day Greece. He is there to get the collection that they had taken up along with the Philippian church to help out the needy Jewish Christians living in Jerusalem. (And then, he would stop by Rome on his way to Spain—after a 2,000 mile detour.)

The need in Jerusalem—

The Jewish historian Josephus writes about a severe famine in Judea between A.D. 44 - 48 and this could have been part of the reason for the need. But there is another reason: When Pentecost happened, a whole lot of Jews from all over the Roman Empire, became Christians. And many of them stayed right there! Why not? It's the only church in the world at that time. The Apostles are there. You wouldn't want to leave either. So they stayed, and that created physical needs. Especially after a few years passed. Some of the older men began to die off leaving widows who needed to be supported, placing a burden on the church—read about this in Acts 6.

- So the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were really struggling, and this was by divine design! God wanted to bring Jew and Gentile together by having the Gentile churches come to the aid of their Jewish brothers and sisters with money for their need.

It was a big, big deal to Paul that Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ would get along and show off the reconciling power of the Gospel! It was a big enough deal to cause him to put his unreached peoples' ministry on hold until he got the money together and got back to Jerusalem.

By the way, Paul also wanted the Romans to kick in some dough. In v.24, when he says that he wants to be helped on his way, that word "helped" was a technical term for missionary support. It's not exaggerating to say that Romans was a missionary support letter, and Paul's explanation of the Gospel in the first eleven chapters was in order to prepare their hearts and minds for helping to meet this need.

This is why Paul takes a 2,000 mile detour before he can come to Rome . . . on his way to Spain.

He made plans based upon his priorities. Along the way, he snatched up present opportunities to do good for people. And he prayed and entrusted all of it to God's good providence. Look at the way he ends this passage—

- Romans 15:30-33 ³⁰I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, ³¹that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³²so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. ³³May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

So how do we balance people, plans, and the will of God?

1.) Make plans based on priorities and don't be afraid of God changing those plans.

Make big plans. Bold plans! William Carey said: Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.

- 22 years ago, some of us dreamed of a Christian school - we planned our ways, God directed our steps, and Middletown Christian School has been shaping hearts and minds now for 20 years.

- A few months ago, we planned on building a 60'X90' dorm to house the teams coming out to build for Hope City. That was big, bold plan. And God said no! That's great! We want His plan, not ours.
- We've all been praying for Karen Raymer's big, bold plan to bring her friend Boaz from Kenya to see if his kidney will be a match for her. She's made her plan, and now she can trust God to direct her steps.

2.) Seize opportunities to do good to people, even if they aren't part of your plans, but don't be afraid to say no.

- Some of us need to open our eyes to the needs around us, and put our own desires aside to meet those needs. Scripture tells us that "Jesus went about doing good." We need to be like Jesus.

But some of us need to be more purposeful and prayerful about which needs we meet - so that we don't end up enabling people, and neglecting our other God-give priorities.

Let me end with this. I mentioned William Carey earlier. We call him the father of modern missions. But he was invited to preach one Sunday at the Friar Lane Baptist Chapel in Nottingham, England. May 30, 1792. He wanted to stir up his sleepy Baptist friends to the cause of exalting Christ among all the peoples. So he chose as his text, this passage—

- Isaiah 54:2-3 ²"Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes.
³For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities.

His sermon had only two points—

- 1.) expect great things from God,
- 2.) attempt great things for God.

Apparently, his audience was unmoved. But God ultimately used that sermon to found the "Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel to the Heathen," and they send William Carey as one of their first missionaries. He served in India for 4 years without a furlough. I could easily spend an hour just listing all that he accomplished for the Gospel through his work in translating the Scriptures into over 40 dialects.