

NOVEMBER 7 2025 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

In the letter to the Romans, Paul is writing this letter at the end of his third missionary journey. Scripture scholars tell us it's the year 57 after the death of Christ. He's writing it from Corinth. And while he's there at Corinth, he has one bucket list: "I want to go to Rome." "I want to go to Rome to proclaim the Good News, to proclaim the gospel." And from there, he does not end. He has a vision to go to Spain.

Little does he know that although he has never visited Rome, this prophecy would take place in a few months' time. Not only that, but it would take place in a way he hardly imagined. He returns from his third missionary journey, fulfilling all the traditions as a good Jewish rabbi. But he does something wrong—he brings some Gentiles into the Temple courtyard and, at once, he's arrested. He is brought before the Governor Festus and King Agrippa.

While he is there, he realizes that the Pharisees and the Scribes have made a plot to kill him. So, he appeals to the Emperor. Now, Paul was a Roman citizen, and therefore, as soon as he appealed to the Emperor, he was given the mandate and was put on a ship that was going to Rome in order to appeal personally to the Emperor. Paul hardly realized that this was going to be the way he would proclaim the Gospel.

So, what does he say in this letter to the Romans? He makes three points. He has never been to Rome itself, but he has heard about the people in the church at Rome. They are believers who had a Jewish background, and there were believers who were Gentiles. The most important thing was to have a sense of unity in this church. This is what would attract people.

In my own lifetime, Mahatma Gandhi in India said, “You Christians have the best possible way of life, the best possible way to get peace, unity, and harmony. The sad thing is you Christians don’t practice it.” And that was the truth. Mahatma Gandhi wanted to be a Christian, but he said, “There is nothing that you do that attracts me to you apart from your things that are still on the paper. You have to show it in your own life.”

And so, here Paul is on the way, and he knows that the unity that the church in Rome will show will attract people together. But then Paul also knows that in order to be an apostle, to proclaim the Good News, and to help people realize, as he said at the end of the letter, that for those who haven’t seen and those who haven’t heard, they must know that the salvation of God is for all people.

Now, how would he actually proclaim that? The next part of his letter is to establish his own credentials. He says, “I have been called as an Apostle. And I have got signs, and wonders, and the power of the Holy Spirit to affirm this, to show the credence of my ability to be an apostle to you. And I’ve got only one thing to do.”

That was the third point of his letter. He says, “I am not preaching my own self, I am preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.” It is in Him, through Him, and with Him that this whole belief, this whole group of believers, will be held together. Apart from that, it is not going to hold any water whatsoever.

Little did Paul know that when he went to Rome, he would not have the freedom of moving about in Rome. He was sent as a prisoner. He was under house arrest; he had to pay money to the guard that guarded him and provide food as well. But he had the freedom to tell people that the

good news of the gospel was for everybody, and that salvation was universal.

As we come to the gospel, the only connection between that and the letter to the Romans is the fact that the kingdom of God has to be proclaimed to all people. As Jesus would say in the fourth chapter of Luke's gospel, "The Spirit of the Lord has come down upon me to proclaim the good news to the poor."

And now, Jesus gives us an example. Scripture scholar Scott Lewis tells us here was a slimy character. Why would Jesus proclaim this corrupt manager as a model for us? Actually, Jesus proclaims two corrupt, slimy characters: in chapter 16, the corrupt manager; in chapter 18, the unjust judge who said, "I fear neither God nor man, and I'll do what I want." Seems familiar to many of our leaders that we have today, doesn't it? "I will do what I want and there's nobody to stop me."

Now, Jesus does not provide these two to us as examples to be imitated. Rather, Jesus shows these people as ones who use their ingenuity, who use their skills and talents to continue the work that they have to do. The corrupt manager is something that you and I have experienced through 2,000 years since Jesus gave that parable. We have heard of so many people that have doctored the books and robbed their companies of millions of dollars—and it happens both outside the church and within the church.

Our sad story of the Vatican, where a Cardinal invested—where he was trusting in ordinary people—and lost the Vatican over \$146 million. So here we have two people, and Jesus says, "Look at their shrewdness, look at their chutzpah, how they use these things." And Jesus says, "Use the same for the kingdom of God."

We have to use our talents to look at the audience that we are proclaiming the gospel to. For example, I wouldn't ask the people in the Arctic to buy a refrigerator, or, when in Guyana, I wouldn't ask a gas station to be put in the middle of the Amazon. We use our brains. We look at the people, we think, "What are the things that will attract them to the message of the gospel?"

And we use the terms, the culture, and the tradition of the people in order to proclaim the good news so that Jesus Christ is known everywhere—Jesus Christ today, tomorrow, and for all eternity.

God bless you all.