

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part 60

Sunday, November 1st, 2020 - 6:30 p.m.

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FOLLOWING OUR LORD NOT ONLY TO THE *UNSAVED*, BUT THE *UNREACHED*

Tonight's text is long because it contains a thread of argument that can't really be split up very neatly:

Romans 15:7-24 - "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.[8] For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, [9] and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." [10] And again it is said, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.' [11] And again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.' [12] And again Isaiah says, 'The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.' [13] May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. [14] I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. [15] But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God [16] to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. [17] In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. [18] For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, [19] by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ...."

[20].... "and 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, [21] but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand." [22] This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. [23] But 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, [24] I 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."

There is a very specific *kind* of missionary endeavor described in these verses. When you come right down to it, everybody believes in missions. Every church thinks it is

important to reach the lost - at least every truly New Testament church. And, in a sense, every dime spent - unless it's just foolishly wasted - is spent doing some form of **"missionary"** endeavor.

We have many churches in our own denomination who give almost nothing to our fellowship's global missionary outreach because they say they're **already** giving to missions when they spend their funds on their own local church. It's **kind of** true, but it's mostly a selfish crock.

That's the central call of this great text. There is something deeper being dealt with in this passage than the ministries of any one local church. Paul describes - and **defines** - an aspect of missionary work that almost always gets squeezed out of the picture. Everybody has their idea of what true missionary work is. What I want to look at today is what I would call the **backbone** of New Testament missionary work. I want to talk about **frontier** missionary work. I want to talk about the most **costly** - the most **difficult** - and yet the most **essential** kind of outreach needed today.

And I want to do something even more radical than that. I want to call people from this church to consider this kind of sacrificial missionary work. I want to challenge you with the idea that, whatever you happen to be doing with your life right now, however successful you may be, and however contented you may be, it is entirely possible that God wants to lift you out of where you are and what you are doing and place you into preparation for full time, life long, frontier missionary work.

Let's look at these verses together:

- 1) **CHRIST'S DEATH ON THE CROSS DIDN'T JUST BRING PAUL FORGIVENESS. IT BROUGHT PAUL A PATTERN FOR LIVING HIS WHOLE LIFE**

Romans 15:8-12 - "For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, [9] and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." [10] And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people. [11] And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him." [12] And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope."

You've seen those little bracelets - "**WWJD**" - "***What Would Jesus Do?***" Most of us think of that question when it comes to issues of personal holiness and response to temptation or trial. But Paul thought of that question in terms of ***what he was going to do with the rest of his life. What would Jesus do?***

Paul says that Christ's coming wasn't just an accident. God didn't just get up one morning and decide He was going to do something nice for mankind. Paul says that Jesus came to fulfill a promise - "**....in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs**"(8).

What promise is Paul talking about? You can read it in **Genesis 12:3** - "**I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**" Those are God's words to Abraham. "I'm going to bless the ***whole earth*** through your seed. I'm going to do something that will be specifically geared to reach ***beyond you and beyond your people to bless the whole world!***"

Then, in **verse 9**, Paul goes on to affirm that God's whole purpose in this world is to reach the unreached. His goal is that "**....the Gentiles** [the pagans, outside the

covenant] might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, ‘Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.’”

This is obviously a very important thought to Paul, because he almost gets monotonous in piling up other Old Testament proof texts to help him say *the mission of Jesus is to reach all peoples, all nations for the glory of God.*

In **verse 9** he quotes **Psalm 18:50** - “Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles.” In **verse 10** he quotes **Deuteronomy 32:43** - “Rejoice, O Gentiles (nations) with His people.” In **verse 11** he quotes **Psalm 117:1** - “Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles; and let all the peoples extol him.” Then in **verse 12** he quotes **Isaiah 11:10** - “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles, in him will the Gentiles hope.”

Here’s what we are to see in these passages. God’s plan - His mission - is to be glorified for His mercy by *all the peoples of the earth*. Not just the Jewish people, not just the religious people, not just the *easy to reach* people. God wants to be glorified for His mercy among all the nations and peoples of the earth.

Here’s what all this meant for Paul. He saw his life *picking up where Jesus’ life left off*. If he was Jesus’ *servant*, he must continue to do Jesus’ *work*. Paul saw his assignment flowing out of what God had already demonstrated of His own heart’s desire for the world in which Paul lived.

2) **IF REACHING THE NATIONS WAS CHRIST’S PURPOSE, PAUL WAS GRIPPED BY THE FACT THAT IT MUST BE HIS PURPOSE AS WELL**

We’ve already read Paul’s words in **Romans 15:18-24**. There are *three*

statements in these verses that show the stunning impact the life of Jesus and His Spirit had on the missionary activity of the Apostle Paul:

- a) **Romans 15:19b** - “....so that from **Jerusalem** and all the way around to **Illyricum** I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ”

Don't rush too quickly over those words. They are truly amazing. In less than 23 years Paul had single handedly taken the gospel from **Jerusalem** in the southern end of Palestine to the land that connects **Northern Greece and Northern Italy**. He had preached the gospel in every area of the entire eastern Mediterranean. He could actually say, “I have covered this whole area. There are no new areas for me to reach. My work here is finished.”

Now, not everyone was **saved** in those areas. There was still much work for the churches to do. There would still be the need for evangelism and teaching and discipleship. But that's not the work we're talking about today. We're talking about **frontier missions**. We're talking about reaching the **unreached nations and people groups of the world**.

Never let anyone tell you that the job of reaching the unreached people groups of the world is finished. It's not. John Piper estimates that there are still **1.9 billion people in 10,000 different people groups** that are still unreached with the gospel.

And when I say **unreached** peoples, I don't just mean **unsaved** peoples. There are far more than 1.9 billion unsaved people on planet earth. There are unsaved people all over Newmarket. There are unsaved people right on your doorstep.

When I say there are 1.9 billion people in 10,000 different people groups, I mean these people aren't just **unsaved**. They have no significant **exposure** to the message of Jesus Christ at all. They are still totally in the dark. They **don't know** about Jesus, and they have **no chance to know about Jesus!**

That's the challenge that comfortable North American churches must keep burning into their routines. Our church programs are truly important. In fact, they're essential. But I want to say with all my heart, they are not **enough**. They are not our **entire** assignment. Not by a long shot.

There are at least 40 churches right in the Newmarket area. Let this next sentence register: There are **more** Christians attending our church on Sunday than there are missionaries serving in those 10,000 Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Chinese people groups I mentioned a moment ago.

Please think about that when you wonder ***"What Would Jesus Do?"*** Remember, there are about 700 full time protestant missionaries for the more than 10,000 unreached peoples of the world.

Now, here's my point in citing those words from Paul in **verse 19** - ***"....from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ."***

If Paul, single handedly, took the gospel through that entire region in 23 years, how will we justify our failure, should Jesus come soon, to reach these 10,000 people groups, when the church has had His plan and His instructions for 2000 years? What excuse will I give?

That leads to the second amazing statement Paul makes in these verses:

- b) **Romans 15: 20-21** - "...and 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, [21] but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

Do you have ***aspirations?*** By that I mean, do you have ambitions that are more than just ***casual interests***, but things you ***aspire to?*** What are your ***goals?*** What gets your juices flowing every day?

Paul says he ***aspired - planned out - dreamed up ways - to take the gospel message to more new people.*** Most Christians today spend more time planning their summer vacations than they do planning to reach the unreached. North American Christians, on average, spend ***far*** more money on their pets than they do on reaching the unreached.

Paul says he existed - he ***aspired*** - to go to where the unreached people were. He didn't want to be taking the easy assignment. He didn't want to be one of many working the same crowd.

Here's the test of any believer's spiritual temperature. ***How converted are your ambitions?*** Do you just drift from assignment to assignment? Do you float from job to job. Do you move from house to bigger house? Car to newer car. ***Or is there a big, driving vision behind your life?*** Do you want to make the biggest dent you can possibly make for God in this world? I leave that question with you.

Then look at a third statement in these verses:

- c) **Romans 15:23-24** - “...But 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, [24] I 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.”

Spain? How did Paul even **know** there was such a place as Spain? In a world with no TV, no internet, no jet aircraft, how would he get a burden for Spain?

I'll tell you what I think happened. Paul did travel by ship. He met a lot of people. I think his knowledge of Spain came from his desire to take the gospel to new peoples and places. I think he was constantly keeping his ear to the ground. He would listen to those sailors on those ships. He would hear places mentioned. Then he would ask about the people there. He would ask about their religious backgrounds. He would ask how long it would take to get there.

He was constantly trying to make a way against all odds. He had no **money** to speak of. He wasn't a strong man **physically**. He seemed to have two strikes against him. But he had this **driving vision** to take the gospel to unreached people. Not the people who already had a witness. Not the people who already had a chance. But the people who had no light. The people who were unreached. The people who still didn't know about Jesus.

And he just couldn't be stopped. Here we find Paul, at the end of his life. And here's something absolutely fabulous. His **passion** isn't in **retirement**. His passion is unreached people in Spain.

3) **IF YOU CAN'T GO TO THE UNREACHED PEOPLE, YOU MUST SEND SOMEONE ELSE TO TAKE YOUR PLACE**

This too is in our text: **Romans 15:23-24** - “....But 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, [24] I 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.”

“To be helped on my journey there *by you...*” Of course, it takes a special kind of commitment to go to the unreached people of the world. You have to leave your home. You have to forsake many earthly comforts. Perhaps, like Paul, you leave aside marriage and family. Most of the time you must learn a new language. You have to adapt to strange lands and customs. You rarely get rich.

But God requires equal commitment from the ***goer*** and the ***sender***. Each makes a ***different*** sacrifice. But each must make an ***equal*** sacrifice. So I learn I'm accountable for the reaching of those 1.9 billion unreached people in those 10,000 people groups. I said, ***I'm accountable***.

And so are ***you***. If I don't go, then I have to make sure someone else takes my place. I'm either a goer or a sender. ***But those are the only two alternatives. You can go. You can send. Or you can live in disobedience to Jesus.*** There are no other choices.