

Romans 15:14-33

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 February 2022

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] We do turn with me to Romans chapter 15. Romans chapter 15. Which if you've got a church Bible, it's on page 949. I think.

You know what that's like? There's nothing more boring than other people's travel plans. Have a look at verses 24 and 25. I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and to be helped on my journey there by you.

And once I've enjoyed your company for a while, at present, however, I'm going to Jerusalem and bring aid to the saints. So he's writing two Christians in Rome, the Apostle Paul.

He wants to go to Spain, but he's having a stopover in Rome. And he's looking forward to catching up with the Christians there. However, he says, now, at the moment, I'm on my way to Jerusalem, which is the opposite direction from Rome.

And he's writing from Corinth. He says, I want to go to Spain. I'm going to have a stopover in Rome. But right now, I've got to go to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people.

[1 : 24] And he's actually in Corinth. Corinth. He wants to go to Spain, stopover in Rome. First of all, he needs to go to Corinth. That's a 3,000-mile round trip. What's going on there?

Has he got a cheap flight? You know, isn't it? Sometimes if you want to go far away, let's say you want to go to Australia, I don't know, you can go through Morocco or something like that, if you can get a cheap flight, or something like that.

Has his travel agent come up with a good deal? Has he got a round-the-world ticket? Why else would you go from Corinth to Spain through Jerusalem with a stopover in Rome? Why does he want to go to Spain?

Is it for the beaches in Barcelona or the bars in Benidorm or the museums in Madrid? Why does he want to go to Spain? He tells us, look at verse 20.

It is to bring the good news about the Lord Jesus to the ends of the earth. He's looking for a new field of service. He's wanting to break new ground for the gospel. See what he says in verse 20? And thus I make it my ambition, my desire to preach the gospel, the good news, not where Christ has already been named.

[2 : 43] Francis Xavier was the founder of the Jesuits in the 17th century. And he famously challenged a bunch of university students in his days with these words, give up your small ambitions.

Come with me and save the world. And that is what Paul is saying to the church in Rome. That is, if you're wondering, actually the message of Romans.

Romans. It's not a systematic theology for kind of Bible nerds or theological students. Romans is an apology for worldwide evangelization.

The message of Romans is come with me and save the world. And that's what Paul wants to do. Join me in breaking new ground for the gospel. And if reading Romans doesn't make you want to do that, then you've not understood it properly.

And so what will that look like to join Paul in that enterprise of bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth? Four things about how we will go where no one else has gone before.

[3 : 53] And the four things are, all beginning with P, proclaiming, pioneering, partnering, and praying. And so first of all, world mission, if I can put it like that, is about proclaiming Christ.

Do you see what he says in verse 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, Illyricum, that's Albania, from Jerusalem all the way around the eastern Mediterranean to Illyricum, I fully proclaim the gospel of Christ.

And he's obviously been strategic, hasn't he? he's not talking about every single individual in those regions has heard the gospel, but he's gone to strategic cities and centers, and he's planted churches all across the Mediterranean.

And now he wants to go to Spain and evangelize the West Mediterranean. Do you see how it's described there? It's described there, isn't it, to proclaim, to preach the gospel.

And that's very helpful to you and I because it's saying that mission work is essentially proclamation. And that might sound really obvious, but it's not obvious to a lot of churches and to a lot of people.

[5 : 09] I recently heard of a couple of ministers who'd been trained theologically. They'd been working in churches and teaching the Bible there, but they were turned down by a missionary society because the only thing that they could do was teach the Bible.

Now, granted, it's difficult to get into some countries unless you have other skills, but we must never forget that mission work is essentially proclamation of the gospel.

That's what it is. Other things will go along with that. We're going to see that, aren't we? Paul is taking up an offering, a collection for famine relief at the same time.

That's a good thing, but don't confuse the two things. Helping the poor and needy is not mission work. It's mercy ministry. It flows out from the gospel, but it isn't the mission of the church.

World mission is about the proclamation of the good news of the Lord Jesus, of Jesus Christ. Just note the language Paul uses to describe this activity of proclaiming.

[6 : 15] It's very interesting language in verse 15 and 16. On some point, I've written to you very boldly by a way of reminder because of the grace given to me by God 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.

Now, if you're familiar with your Bibles at all, you read verse 16 and it immediately starts to ring bells.

It's the language of the Old Testament. It is actually temple terminology that Paul uses to describe himself. The word minister is literally liturgist. That's how he sees himself.

You know what a liturgy is. You've got one in front of you. It's your order of service. A liturgy is simply an order of service and that's how Paul describes his ministry.

He sees himself as a liturgist of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. Is that how you see evangelism? Have you ever thought of evangelism as worship?

[7 : 24] As your reasonable worship that you owe to God because of the gospel of Jesus? Do you see that way? So lots of people want to draw a wedge between evangelism, telling of the gospel and worship.

But according to Paul here, evangelism is worship. It's how we are to say thank you to God for what he's done for us in the Lord Jesus.

Proclaiming the gospel of God to the world is our priestly duty. And those who become Christians under his ministry, he describes them as an offering acceptable to God.

They are sanctified. That means they're set apart by the Holy Spirit as he preaches the gospel. And he now brings them to God as a thank offering for what God has done for him in Christ.

Do you see priestly ministry in the New Testament? It's not about wearing robes or wearing a tie. Priestly worship in the New Testament, it's not about offering sacrifices on an altar. It's not smells and bells.

[8 : 27] It is proclaiming Christ. So tonight, the Lord's table will be spread for us. And we learned last week in the children's talk, we talked to the children and we said that the Lord's table, it is a table not an altar.

It's not pushed up against the north of the building. It's a table, it's not an altar. I think it's John leading communion tonight. when John leads communion tonight, he won't stand in front of the table.

He'll stand behind the table. He won't stand in front of you with his back to you offering a sacrifice. No, the Lord's table is a visible sermon.

What do we learn tonight when we take the bread and the wine? Paul tells us as we take the bread and the wine tonight as his church, we proclaim the Lord's death till he comes.

That's what we're doing. That's why we have the Lord's Supper. It is to keep us on mission. It's to remind us what we're here for. So it's not about a priest standing at an altar representing Christ's

body and blood to God as a sacrifice.

[9 : 39] That is actually blasphemy. No, it is about representing once and for all the sacrifice of Christ. It's really different. And so at the Lord's table we're not representing the sacrifice.

It is done. It is finished. And so when we break the bread and the wine we are simply proclaiming that. And that's our message to the world.

It's our message to you today if you're a visitor. That you don't have to do anything to put yourself right with God because Jesus Christ has done it all. Jesus Christ has shed his blood.

He's died the death you should have died. And God has raised him from the dead. And that is the message we have. Martin Luther said the Christian life is like this.

We live as if Christ died yesterday rose again today and is coming back tomorrow. And that is what we have to say to this world. And it's as urgent and as fresh and as vital as that.

[10 : 40] It's what the Lord's Supper is all about. It is the good news that through Jesus Christ and his death on the cross that middle wall that middle wall of partition has come down.

And so what divided them in the ancient world that divide between Jews on one side and Gentiles on the other and it was a huge huge problem but now we're told that there's neither Jew nor Gentile and we are one in Christ Jesus.

It's what the Lord's table tells us. And that is a powerful demonstration of that in this passage. So look at verse 26. Verse 26 the Apostle Paul talks about the collection.

And he goes hundreds and even thousands of miles out of his way to take up this offering. He's taking up an offering from Gentile churches that he's planted for Jewish believers in Jerusalem because they've experienced demonstration.

It's a practical demo of what the gospel does. That those who are now enemies are giving to one another and it reconciles people to God and to each other and it pulls down barriers and it makes them one.

[12 : 01] I was talking to someone this week who'd been at a kind of global conference for church planters and also attending that conference were two men from the Congo in Africa.

And these two men they were joint leaders of a church planting movement consisting of about 7,000 churches. But these two men who were leading the church planting movement they had been on opposite sides of the civil war.

In fact one of the men had been personally responsible for the massacre of the other's family. And yet there they were years later in that conference together fellow Christians fellow workers fellow laborers brothers in Christ.

That's what the gospel does. that's what we should expect to see happening in London. Let's not be that ambitious. That's what we should expect to see happening in Ealing. In our own community as we proclaim the Lord's death as we gather around the Lord's table like we will this evening we see barriers coming down.

They might be cultural they might be racial they'll certainly be personality differences. Barriers whatever they are and the gospel brings down barriers so that we are all one in Christ. And that's what the gospel had been doing all the way from Eastern Europe the Mediterranean from Jerusalem up to Illyricum to the shores of the Adriatic Sea into Serbia and Albania and Macedonia Paul says.

[13 : 45] Walls have come down and people have come out of their ghettos and embraced one another as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. and Paul is saying to you and I that is a very exciting thing to be part of.

Come with me and change the world. It's my ambition Paul says to go where people have not heard about the Lord Jesus. So this is the second thing we've seen about proclaiming Christ.

Without that message we've got nothing to say to the world. It's about proclaiming Christ and him crucified but secondly it's about pioneering Do you see what Paul says? He says in verse 20 it's my ambition to preach the gospel that's the good news where Christ was not known.

If the Apostle Paul was a Star Trek fan he would say it's my ambition to boldly go where no one else has gone before. The final frontier.

In 1768 there was another captain not Captain Kirk who said that Captain Cook. He was a 39 year old British sea captain. He set off on a journey of scientific discovery.

[15 : 01] He'd been hired by the Royal Society to observe the transit of Venus across the sun. The journey would literally take Captain Cook into uncharted waters. when he eventually saw a

shoreline he said the shoreline reminded him of South Wales.

So he called it New South Wales. That man was Captain Cook. Here's a line from his journal. This is what he says. He said I had ambition not only to go further than any man had been before but as far as it was possible for man to go.

That's Paul's ambition in verse 20. Not because he's a great adventurer not because he's reckless some kind of Bear Grylls character but because there are people that hadn't heard about the Lord Jesus.

And you see Paul's ambition comes right out of the Bible. Look at verse 21. He quotes from Isaiah there and he says but as it is written those who've never been told of him will see and those who've never heard of him will understand.

and he's saying to the Romans let's go and find those people who've never heard. Because the Bible tells me that those who've not heard about him they will see and those who've not understood about him they will understand.

[16:26] So come with me. Let's go and find these people whether in some unexplored part of the planet or in West London. suburbs people groups slices of the community that have never heard about the Lord Jesus.

Let's go and find them says Paul. Come with me and change the world. When the London Missionary Society interviewed David Livingstone he was the great pioneer missionary he was asked where he wanted to go and he said anywhere as long as it's forward.

And when he arrived in Africa he said he was haunted by the smoke of a thousand villages stretching out before him. I don't know whether you're back in work or you're back on the tube but you will remember what it's like to walk through Ealing Broadway at rush hour.

at the station where there are crowded people from all over the world going in different directions. Doesn't it haunt you all those people that when you look into their faces and you see in their eyes that they are without hope and without God.

All these communities where there is no gospel church all these people who do not know the Lord Jesus. And those things haunted Paul.

[18:00] They disturbed his sleep. And you might be sitting there thinking well after all the centuries of missionary activity no one needs to pioneer today do they?

And you might think there's nowhere else to go with the gospel but you'd be totally wrong because the need today is ten times greater than it was in the Apostle Paul's day. There are ten times as many people who are unreached.

There are eight million Muslims in Europe who are un-evangelized. One in five people have never heard of Jesus. Dozens and dozens of people groups are without a Bible in their own language. Whole nations without a church because the job isn't finished. And Paul says come with me and change the world. I read of an African bishop who was being shown around a country church in England.

It's a beautiful summer's day and the vicar was very, very proud of this church. And he said, this church has been here for 800 years preaching the gospel.

[19:09] And with tears in his eyes the African bishop said, what took you so long? What took you so long? Why did it take so many centuries for the church to wake up to its responsibility take the gospel to those who have not yet heard?

Still today there are people out there waiting to hear the gospel for the first time. Waiting for us to put on our gospel boots. Do you know how the gospel came to South Korea?

Some of my favorite stories. And the gospel came to South Korea by a Welsh missionary. His name was Robert German Thomas. He comes from not very far from where I was brought up. In 1866 he stepped off a boat just off Pyongyang.

He stepped into the river. He was carrying a load of Bibles in his hands and he stepped off the boat into the river and he waded to the shore with a backpack full of Bibles.

He was speared to death there and then. Robert German Thomas was the man who brought the gospel to Korea. Because what happened was as he died those Bibles kind of went fluttering into the sea and onto the beach and were carried off by the wind.

[20:31] And people picked up those pages of the Bibles and they started using them as wallpaper. And then they started to read the wallpaper. And then they started to become Christians.

They got converted. And that's the mind of Paul isn't it? Come with me he says I know it's risky. Come with me there are people out there who've never heard.

C.T. Studd said why should anyone have the opportunity to reject the gospel twice when some have not had the opportunity to hear it once. And there are people wanting to hear.

It may mean for some of you that as a result of this sermon you want to give your life to going abroad with the gospel. That would be a wonderful thing. But it doesn't necessarily mean that.

Because it happens every day of your life doesn't it? I think it takes enormous courage to come out as a Christian in your workplace and in your school.

[21 : 42] And what Romans 15 is about is whether you're willing to come out to make the effort to speak to someone about the Lord Jesus certainly means praying for opportunities.

And so you ask me who are these people who have not heard? And they're growing up in Ealing in our schools. Our kids are biblically illiterate. And they don't know who Jesus is.

Who are those people who have not heard? You're sitting next to them on the bus. How can we find them? Where can we reach them? Paul wrote Romans to put this on our agenda.

To boldly go where no one has gone before. You up for that? And that's what we're here for isn't it? That's what we're going to remind ourselves tonight. That according to the Lord's table we're here to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

It'll mean proclaiming, pioneering, it'll mean partnering because we can't do this on our own. And that's what he's doing with this letter of the Romans. Look at verses 23 and 24. He's recruiting them.

[22 : 52] But now since I no longer have any room for work in those regions, since I've longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I've enjoyed your company for a while.

You can read that as if the Apostle Paul's a bit of a freeloader, as if he's a spiritual tourist. that he just wants a bed for the night.

But we mustn't read it like that because actually he's using technical language. I want you to assist me on my journey to Spain, he says.

That's the same language that he wrote to Titus when he says do everything you can to help Zetus, the lawyer, and Apollos on their way. See to it that they have everything they need.

Zetus and Apollos were not freeloaders, they were gospel workers who needed support. There was no central fund. So Paul puts it on the conscience of Titus to help them.

[23 : 56] He says ensure that they have all they need to take the gospel. And Paul lays it on the conscience of Titus. It's your duty to help them. The Apostle John uses very similar language.

He writes to his friend Gaius in 3 John. And he says this, dear friend, he says you are faithful in what you're doing. Beloved, it's a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church.

You would do well to send them on their journey, the same language, in a manner worthy of God. For they've gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. You see, Gaius was a Christian. Gaius was the kind of guy who in church life could be relied upon to help gospel workers on their way.

There's another guy in that church called Diotrephes, and he was the one that ruled the roost, tells us Diotrephes loved to be first.

[25 : 00] He will have nothing to do with us, Paul says. He refuses to welcome the brothers. He stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

how many churches have been ruined by power brokers who hold the reins, who allow nothing to happen without their fingerprints on it. It's a challenge, isn't it?

Are we Diotrephes, me first, or Gaius wanting to see the work go forward? Helping or hindering? And so when Paul tells the Roman church in Romans 15, I want you to assist me on my journey,

he's not asking them just for a bed for the night.

He says, the reason I'm coming to Rome is to recruit a team, not just to enjoy your company. It's to plunder your church. He's saying to the Romans, I want you to be the new Antioch.

[25 : 57] I want you to be the base for huge church growth and world evangelization. We'll see in chapter 16 next week, he wants to partner with them to send him out to Spain.

So the question is, will I go or will I stay? Come with me, join with me in this great enterprise of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

And the question is, shall I go or will I stay? And every single one of us has got to wrestle with that question. Philip Jensen, he's now an old Australian minister, he had a great influence kind of 20 years ago.

And a friend of mine went to a conference with him and Philip Jensen was talking about the need for gospel preachers, for people to take the gospel. And he was interviewing some of the guys and one of the young men, he was on a career path, he was a lawyer, he was doing very well for himself, his family was very proud, but he shared the challenge to basically give his life to be a preacher of the gospel.

And obviously it was a big challenge for him and his family as the week went on. He thought about his family, who wants their son to grow up to be a poor preacher. And he came to Philip to say, I just don't think it's for me, it's not for me.

[27 : 17] And Philip Jensen said something to him which was typically Australian, typically in his face. He said, it's okay, he says, it's okay to be a lawyer, it's okay to earn loads of money, you'll be able to support gospel ministry, that's a great path.

And Philip said to him, if that's the way that the Lord is leading you, that's perfectly okay, and it's good to be a lawyer and to serve the Lord by doing it. To earn lots of money, use the gifts God has given you.

Philip Jensen said this, here's my challenge to you. He said, how about you live on a minister's salary, though, and you give the rest away? Now, that's said tongue-in-cheek, and I wouldn't give that advice to you all, but I do think there's a serious point there, isn't there?

And what Philip Jensen was trying to say is how serious was this guy about bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth? And so Romans teaches us it's high time for us to wake up because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed, and Jesus is coming back and there are still loads and loads and loads and loads of people who haven't heard.

And so the question is, should I go or should I stay? To use the time that God has given me, which is really, really limited, to strengthen the bill, to grow, to help plant Christchurch.

[28 : 41] So with all the skills that God has given you, is there somewhere that you could go? Will you go or will you stay? And that brings me to my final point, which I'll try and hurry through, that if you're going to stay, it must be to pay and to pray.

To pray. That's the most important thing. Look at verse 30. I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me.

I think if you've got a different version, it will say to struggle with me in your prayers to God on my behalf. Praying is a struggle, isn't it? Praying is hard work sometimes.

Occasionally people say this to me, they say, I came to the prayer meeting but I didn't get anything out of it. I came once or twice but I didn't get anything out of it. You're not meant to get anything out of it. You're meant to put something into it.

It's work, isn't it? It's a struggle. And if people are going to be converted, we need to be praying.

Praying. Do you remember those three old codgers up on the hill in Exodus?

[29 : 58] The Israelites are fighting with the Amalekites down on the plain and Aaron and Hur are up on the plains holding Moses' hands up. Three old guys.

And it says as long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning. And it's so often, isn't it, the old codgers who pray. Octogenarians like Aaron and Moses and Hur.

We had on Wednesday night a pretty remarkable prayer meeting. In many ways, it was remarkable for the sheer numbers that were there. I was so encouraged.

If you were there, I hope you were encouraged too. prayer meetings are not cool, are they, in church life. If you go onto the websites of cool churches in London and you look at the corporate prayer meetings, you'll have to dig around a little bit.

Samuel Nesli, in his book, Amongst Soviet Evangelicals, which is one of the most boring books of all time, tells of a visit to a big Baptist church in Moscow after the end of the Cold War.

[31 : 10] And he noticed in the congregation row after row of women dressed in black. And he asked the minister, who are those ladies sitting up there all in black? Ah, said the pastor, those are the women who prayed communism out of Russia.

They didn't have Kalashnikov rifles. They had Bibles. Those babushkas. They prayed communism out of Russia. And join with me, Paul says, in my struggle.

Do you want to bring new ground for the gospel? Do you want to see churches evangelized into existence? Let me tell you, that isn't happening in the UK. Most church growth in the UK is shuffling the pack. And do we want to see churches evangelized into existence?

We do, don't we? Well, it begins in the prayer meeting, in corporate kingdom-centered praying.

When William Carey went to India with the gospel, he wrote to his friend Andrew Fuller.

I think you're learning about William Carey in 16, aren't you? He's a great man. And William Carey wrote this to his friend Andrew Fuller. He was a missionary to India. He said, I am going to the pit, but you must hold the rope.

[32 : 24] You must hold the rope. And who are you holding the rope for? Just a polite interest in Christ's church. Join with me in my struggle, Paul says.

Verse 31 and 32. I appeal to you brothers by our Lord Jesus Christ, verse 30, by the love of the Spirit to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service as a language of worship for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

So a question, did God answer Paul's prayer? Well, we're going to study the book of Acts in house group and you will find that God did answer his prayer but not in the way he expected.

And he eventually got to Rome, but before that they paid pass the parcel with him. He went through Roman trials and courts and appearances and shipwrecks and snake bites and he arrived there in chains, expenses paid by Emperor Nero, but he got there in the end.

And God may not answer your prayers this morning in the way that you want. Maybe that's why you don't pray them. We're scared of how much God might answer them.

[33 : 39] Perhaps we're afraid he might make us the answer to our own prayers. Perhaps we're afraid he might send our loved ones to another part of the world and we only see them on Zoom.

So we don't pray. Remember what Mr. Beaver said to Susan? He said, Aslam is not a safe. He's not a tame lion. What kind of God do you want?

Do you want a boringly predictable God who just rubber stamps your plans when you show them to him if you bother to? Or a sovereignly interesting God who does all things according to his will?

Did he go to Spain, Paul? I don't know. But the book of Acts ends with him under house arrest. It says, Preaching the word of God boldly without hindrance. And that's what matters.

The word of God is not chained. Let's pray. Thank you.