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Sermon Notes

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Paul's Missionary Strategy and Ours

Romans 15:14-22

Introduction

I. Why Paul Hadn't Visited Rome: Focusing on Those Who Haven't Heard

A. Paul Declares His Passionate Focus: Acts 20

Acts 20:24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

B. Paul Describes His Passionate Focus Here: vs. 20

1. By the time he wrote Romans, Paul knew clearly what the specific calling of his life would be
2. He was called to be

A trailblazing, churchplanting missionary apostle among the unreached peoples of the Gentile world

3. He considered this calling to be a gift of God's grace directly to him

Romans 15:15-16 because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles

4. He calls that focus an "ambition" in verse 20
5. And he tells us what his ambition is

Romans 15:20 It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

6. He then supports it with a Scripture verse:

Romans 15:21 Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."

C. Paul Applies His Passionate Focus

Romans 15:22 This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

1. So Romans 15 gives us a powerful insight into Paul's passionate focus
2. It also gives us powerful insight into his entire missionary strategy

II. Paul's Six-Fold Missionary Strategy

A. Founding All Things on God's Written Word

Romans 15:15-16 I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God

1. Romans is at least in part a missionary support letter
2. BUT WHAT A LETTER!
3. Primacy of doctrine in missions
 - a. Carefully delineating the doctrine of the gospel
 - b. Even describing deep things like universal depravity, justification by faith alone, original sin in Adam, sanctification, the ongoing struggle with sin, the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the deep mysteries of predestination applied to the perplexing problem of the Jews
 - c. He also describes in a clear, comprehensive way the godly lifestyle that such a doctrine, such a gospel should produce
4. All things are founded on the written word of God
5. Paul has quoted the Old Testament again and again in his letter
6. Paul also speaks of his own apostolic writing here in verse 15
7. So, the word of God written, explaining solid doctrine is the primary foundation of Paul's missionary strategy

B. Proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Romans 15:15-16 I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God

1. When Paul came to a community, his central work was proclamation
2. He was a herald of the good news of salvation by simple faith in Christ
3. He proclaimed Christ Jesus... His person, His work, His promises, His achievements

4. He certainly gave primary focus to Christ's atoning death on the cross and His justifying resurrection from the dead
5. This is the gospel that he described at the beginning of the epistle as being "the power of God for the salvation of all who believe"
6. He was a proclaimer of Christ Jesus... that was the center of his missionary strategy
7. Nowadays, missions can be used to describe a lot of activities
 - a. Some build church buildings
 - b. Some build hospitals
 - c. Some work as doctors or nurses in those hospitals
 - d. Some go as tentmakers and establish a professional presence so they can live in restricted countries
 - e. Some run radio stations with powerful transmitters
 - f. Some work on learning languages and do translating work
8. But the center of any truly successful mission must be this: the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ

C. Speaking and Living God's Truth

Romans 15:18 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done

1. Two-fold pattern
 - a. Pattern of doctrine

2 Timothy 1:13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus

- b. Pattern of lifestyle

Philippians 3:17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

2. Held out to Timothy as the pattern as well

1 Timothy 4:16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers

Paul's missionary strategy was clear: speaking and living the truth had to go hand in hand

3. Speaking

- a. If the Book of Romans is indication, the gospel is obviously a lengthy and comprehensive body of doctrines that take much explaining
- b. Paul spent countless hours speaking to people about all kinds of doctrines and applications of those doctrines to specific cases they were facing
- c. Sometimes he went from house to house teaching and encouraging people
- d. Sometimes he sat and stitched tents for customers while carrying on discipleship sessions
- e. Sometimes he rented a large lecture hall, like the lecture hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus, to give concentrated teachings on doctrine and Christian living
- f. In all of this, clearly Paul re-establishes the primacy of the spoken word for the renewing of the mind and the transformation of the life

4. Living

- a. Paul also knew his lifestyle was essential to the spread of the gospel
- b. He knew that the messenger of the gospel must also live out the gospel lifestyle
- c. He offered himself frequently as a pattern for others to follow
- d. He lived in their communities and allowed them free access to his life

D. Performing Signs and Wonders

Romans 15:18-19 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done-- ¹⁹ by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.

1. 21st century American Christians are frequently uncomfortable with the discussion of signs and wonders
2. They know that there have been many excesses, especially by charlatans who use contrived healings to attract crowds and fleece people for their own pleasures
3. They also are leery of the Pentecostal movement, and feel uncomfortable with the exuberant worship, the public speaking in tongues, the leaping and dancing in the aisles

4. Some major Bible teachers, like John MacArthur, who are usually extremely reliable guides to scripture exposition, openly teach that all sign gifts have ceased
5. As a result, we tend to skip over the power of signs and wonders even when discussed in the Bible
6. Paul here clearly ascribes the power of his ministry at least in part to the effectiveness of signs and wonders done by the Holy Spirit of God through them

2 Corinthians 12:12 The things that mark an apostle-- signs, wonders and miracles-- were done among you with great perseverance.

7. The signs and wonders had evangelistic power
 - a. Jesus himself linked saving faith to His miracles

John 14:11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.

- b. The miracles helped prove the truthfulness of the apostolic gospel message

Acts 14:3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

Hebrews 2:4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

- c. So also apostolic miracles had evangelistic power
 - d. They drew a crowd, which was usually used for the preaching of the gospel
 - e. They displayed the power, mercy and love of God
 - f. They met intensely felt needs, since they were usually healings
8. They also had the power of encouragement to the local church
 - a. In Troas, young Eutychus fell asleep during one of Paul's lengthy teaching sessions, and fell from a third-story window, and was picked up dead
 - b. Paul threw himself on the young man and he was raised from the dead
 - c. The effect was powerful on that local church:

Acts 20:12 The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

E. Demonstrating the Power of the Holy Spirit

Romans 15:18-19 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done--¹⁹ by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.

1. Paul's mission strategy was essentially this: follow where the Holy Spirit leads, speak what the Holy Spirit says to speak, do it in the open and obvious power of the Spirit, relying on His infinite power to convict, to convert, to protect God's chosen people
2. Paul's ministry was a constant display of the power of the Holy Spirit in the midst of his own weakness

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

3. Paul wanted his hearers to learn to rely not on themselves or on Paul, but on the Holy Spirit
4. So the miracles were a beginning display of the Spirit's coming upon conversion... usually the miraculous speaking in tongues
5. But that could not be all it was: they then had to be taught to rely on the Holy Spirit for the rest of the journey as Christians
6. So Paul demonstrated his open and clear reliance on the Spirit whenever he ministered

F. Venturing Where Christ Is Not Yet Known

vs. 20-21 It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.²¹ Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."

1. We have already covered this somewhat, but it is essential to understanding our ongoing work
2. Paul strategically kept going... he was not called to stay in one place forever

3. That meant when a church had been established, with qualified elders in place who were able to carry on the work, Paul left to begin a new work
4. Paul had a driving ambition to spread a passion for Christ to people who had never heard His name before
5. He knew that this was the work God was doing in the world
6. Why didn't he want to build on another man's foundation?

Illus. Sometimes we will be looking for something at home... searching for an overdue library book or a lost shoe or a specific garment... my kids sometime have the strange tendency to come and look in the exact place where I am looking!! I will lift a couch cushion and they will come over and look under it with me

And I will say, "I am here looking... I've got this particular cushion covered! Why don't you go look where no one else is looking!"

That is Paul's mentality

So why didn't Paul build on someone else's foundation?

- a. That wasn't his calling
 - b. Others would come and build on the foundation he laid, so the work itself is worth doing
 - c. But Paul was given another calling: an ambition to go where no one knows Christ
 - d. Direct fulfillment of God's calling on His life from the words of Isaiah, the prophet:
 - e. When Paul read Isaiah 58:13-15, he felt it was directly God's call on his life
7. Why is this important for us?
- a. So many Christian ministries concentrate their efforts on people who already have good clear opportunities to hear and respond to the gospel
 - b. My first mission trip was the Kenya... but the church in Kenya is in some respects stronger than the church in America; Kenya has been reached with the gospel; and the churches that thrive in that country are strong enough to reach their own countrymen with the gospel
 - c. BUT there are still thousands of unreached people groups
 - i) What is a "people group" you may ask?

- ii) It is a group of human beings bound together by a common language, heritage, customs, who recognize themselves as a common people
 - iii) Donald McGavran, one of the greatest missionary thinkers of the twentieth century was a missionary to India
 - iv) He recognized that there were what he called “homogeneous units” within the complexity of India as a nation that each had to be penetrated with the gospel
 - v) When I was first a student at MIT, the number of unreached people groups was estimated at 15,000. The number has steadily decreased as more and more missionaries have gone forth to speak Christ’s name where people have never heard of him
 - vi) As I mentioned last week, the Joshua Project has the number down to 6600
- d. We talk much about our two infinite journeys... the internal journey of growth in Christ-like maturity and the external journey of worldwide evangelization
 - e. The issue of the external journey is taking the name of Christ to the ends of the earth... to people who have never heard of Him
 - f. It is not so much reaching people as reaching peoples with the gospel... crossing racial and economic and language and social and cultural barriers with some key bridge-building missionaries and helping them establish healthy reproducing churches... that is the work ahead of us

So we see a brief display of Paul’s missionary strategy

- Founding All Things on God’s Written Word
- Proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- Speaking and Living God’s Truth
- Performing Signs and Wonders
- Demonstrating the Power of the Holy Spirit
- Venturing Where Christ Is Not Yet Known

III. Paul’s Missionary Goals

A. A Display of the Glory of God

1. Paul wanted to put God and Christ on display

2. As always that was his top priority

Romans 15:17 Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God.

Romans 15:9 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy

B. The Fulfillment of His Priestly Duty

Vs. 15-16 because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God

1. Paul had a priestly duty to perform
2. He considered it a gift of God's grace to him
3. He also considered it a stewardship for which he would give full account
4. So Paul's goal was to be faithful to the priestly ministry to which God had called him

Acts 26:19-20 "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. ²⁰ First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

C. The Ultimate Offering of the Gentiles

1. Like the Levites of old, he was given a vital ministry
2. But unlike them, he was not offering up the blood of bulls and lambs and goats
3. Rather, he was offering up Gentiles to the glory of God
4. Paul had used sacrificial language earlier in Romans

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.

5. Here now the issue is WORSHIP...

Romans 15:9-12 so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." ¹⁰ Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." ¹¹ And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." ¹² And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."

This is a RIVER of worship, from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, Christ's name is held in honor by worshiping Gentiles from ALMOST every tribe and language and people and nation!!

6. By Paul's priestly ministry of proclaiming the gospel he was turning sin-soaked idolatrous pagan Gentiles into a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God

D. The Glad Obedience of the Gentiles

Romans 15:18 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done

1. The ultimate fragrant offering is the Gentiles themselves, converted and justified by faith in Christ
2. The daily fragrant offering is the OBEDIENCE of the Gentiles to Christ and to his word
3. True faith must produce glad obedience to the commands of God

Romans 1:5 Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.

Romans 16:26 [Paul preaches the gospel] so that all nations might believe and obey Christ

Thus Gentile obedience coming from faith in Christ is the Alpha and Omega of the Book of Romans

4. Without glad obedience on the part of the Gentiles, Paul's ministry would have been a failure

IV. Paul's Astonishing Success

Romans 15:19 So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

A. Amazing Geographical Spread

1. From Jerusalem in the far east of the Roman Empire... beyond the Mediterranean Sea, all the way round to Illyricum, modern-day Yugoslavia, right across the Adriatic from Italy; a total of 1400 miles!!
2. Comprehensive coverage; strategic as well, as Paul traveled along the Egnatian Way, the main thoroughfare of the Roman Empire to the Near East... never

missing a key urban center like Antioch, or Ephesus or Philippi or Athens or Corinth

3. Paul refers to this comprehensive spread in Romans 10

Romans 10:17-18 *Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. ¹⁸ But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."*

B. Astonishing Thoroughness

1. Not only did Paul travel from place to place to place, comprehensively covering all these locations in Palestine, Asia Minor, and Greece

2. He was also astonishingly thorough in his preaching

"I have FULLY proclaimed the gospel of Christ"

3. Paul's amazing doctrinal depth and thoroughness is obviously evident in the Book of Romans itself... he wrestles with the deepest issues of doctrine imaginable

4. We get a clearer picture from his farewell address to the Ephesian elders as well:

Acts 20:20-21 *You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.*

Acts 20:26-27 *Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.*

C. "Nowhere Else to Work"

1. As a result of this development, Paul can find nowhere else to work

2. This did not mean every single person in Asia and Greece had heard the gospel

3. It does mean there were viable churches in all the areas the Spirit had led Paul strategically to go to

4. IF his work is frontier missions where no one has heard the name of Christ!!

5. How would you like to be so faithful that you will be able to say something like this???

6. Jesus Himself made a similar statement

John 17:4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

V. Paul's Appropriate Humility

vs. 17-18 Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. ¹⁸ I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done

A. This is God's Work

1. Paul calls his ministry a gift of God's grace
2. Therefore it was really God's work in and through him from beginning to end

B. Where Then is Boasting? It Is Excluded

1. Paul thus cannot even speak of himself except that he give all glory to God
2. The word "glory" in verse 19 refers to boasting
3. He will not glory in any but in Christ

C. Speaking Only About Christ's Accomplishments

1. Paul says he won't even open his mouth to speak any positive word about himself or his staggering accomplishments except that he give glory to Christ
2. Note that he says it is CHRIST speaking through him, CHRIST ministering through him
3. Therefore Paul's ministry is really merely a continuation of Christ's ministry in reconciling sinners to Himself

D. All That We Accomplish He Has Done for Us

Isaiah 26:12 LORD, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us.

John 3:21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

The elders in heaven cast their own crowns down before the Lamb

So we also will give full glory to Christ for everything we accomplish

VI. Application

A. Lessons Learned

- Focus: Paul's intense sense of calling that caused him to make hard decisions between good things
- Strategy: Paul's strategy for frontier missions
- Accomplishment: Paul's astonishing accomplishments in one lifetime
- Humility: Paul's sense of Christ's work in and through him to accomplish what he's done

B. Lessons Applied

1. Focus:

Therefore we should have a clear focus to our lives, one overriding passion that drives us in everything we do

2. Strategy

We should absorb Paul's six-fold strategy for reaching the lost and make it our own

Therefore also, we should understand why Paul felt such a calling to go to the completely unreached regions of the world, and let concern for those regions constrain our lifestyles: either going or sending

3. Accomplishment

We should attempt and accomplish great things for the glory of God, as a sacrifice pleasing to Him

We should yearn to be able to say at the end of our lives: "I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do."

4. Humility

Therefore also, we should never boast in what we do accomplish, knowing that God has accomplished it through us

COME TO CHRIST!!!!!!!!!!!!!!