

A Man on a Mission

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 0 0] today's reading is from Romans chapter 15 starting from verse 14 and that can be found on page 1142 of the church bibles so Romans 15 verse 14 I myself am convinced my brothers and sisters that you yourselves are full of goodness filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another yet I have written to you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again because of the grace God gave to me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles he gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God sanctified by the Holy Spirit therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God

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've said and done by the power of signs and wonders through the power of the Spirit of God so from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ 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 rather as it is written those who were not told about him will see and those who have not heard will understand this is why I have often been hindered from coming to you but now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions and since I've been longing for many years to visit you I plan to do so when I go to Spain I hope to see you while passing through and that you will assist me on my journey there after I have enjoyed your company for a while now however I'm on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there for Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem they were pleased to do it and indeed they owe it to them for if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews spiritual blessings they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings so after I've completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution

I will go to Spain and visit you on the way I know that when I come to you I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ I urge you brothers and sisters by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the spirit to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there so that I may come to you with joy by God's will and in your company be refreshed the God of peace be with you all amen this is the word of the Lord yes as I was saying good morning and we're in a series in Romans we're just going to look at that together you can find an outline inside the notice sheet which I'm almost going to follow although I have changed it and if you could keep your Bibles open there at page 1142 that would be a great help let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word let's pray we praise you heavenly father for the gift of your word written by Paul but breathed out by your spirit we pray that you will speak to us now by your spirit and that your word will not just be words on a page information for our heads but rather will be spiritual food for our hungry souls for we ask in Jesus name amen well this was the week that the award came out for the best joke at the Edinburgh fringe

I don't know whether you always look out for that some great one-liners Ross Smith was the the only comedian with two jokes on the shortlist his first was this a thesaurus is great there's really no other word for it his second sleep is my favorite thing in the world it is the reason I get up in the morning so that's my tenuous link to the question I'd love us to think about this morning which is what is the real reason you get up in the morning what gets you out of bed in other words what makes life worth living hopefully you can point to relationships to things that you enjoy but it is a brilliant thing when you actually have a cause a purpose that gets you out of bed in the morning something so important to you it's worth really giving your life to and it's even been said actually about younger people people talk about millennials as younger people and I don't think millennials are actually quite so young anymore but there's what is it next generation zed that one of the curses of that younger generation now is a lack of purpose a sense of purposelessness and actually um atheism with Darwinian evolutionary theory doesn't really give you a compelling purpose for life something that's worth giving your life towards and here we encounter Paul as he gets to the end of this letter written to a church opening up about what really drives his life and as we see that purpose it's a life shaped by what Jesus has done for him and it's inspiring for us to think could that be what really drives my life and gets me out of bed in the morning so first he tells us about the mission that gripped him he commends the church he's writing to in verse 14 he's kind of saying there's nothing there's no crisis that made me need to write to you why is he written well he says it's because of his role in life verse 15 yet I've written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the gentiles in other words to the nations the gentiles are the non-jews

Paul was the man charged by the risen Jesus with this role of taking his offer of salvation from God to the nations and he speaks here about his motivation for doing that in verse 16 if you have a look at verse 16 he's using an illustration from the temple he says God gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God so that the gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God sanctified by the spirit it's a picture so you just picture for a minute the old testament imagine you're a jewish believer living under the old covenant that God made with Moses and there's this temple in Jerusalem that's the epicenter of God's presence in the world and you bring in sacrifices and you give them to a priest you wait in line you give them to a priest there's a lot of death in the temple as these sacrifices are offered on the altar to God and there were two kinds of offering under the old covenant there were sin offerings where you brought an animal as part of your atonement for sin and then there were fellowship or thanksgiving offerings and you brought those not because you needed forgiveness but to express the joy that you have in knowing God and being right with him and so they were a way of saying see you had a good harvest you brought in the first fruits the abundant crop and you said to God this is a way of me saying thank you for your blessing to me but also a way of saying actually I don't even need this stuff you are enough for me

[8 : 47] I'm satisfied in you so those those types of offerings now as we've read Romans we've seen that the sin offerings were a foreshadowing of what Christ came to do on the cross that is that God presented Jesus on the cross as a once for all sin offering to deal with all the sin of all those people and all faithful people since and we have communion we're having it later in our morning service as Jesus commanded us to remember what he did there for us so the sin offerings are fulfilled but as new covenant believers we're called to continue this idea of having thanksgiving offerings towards God and that thanksgiving giving offering now is not something we take to a physical temple rather it's ourselves as living sacrifices Romans chapter 12 verse 1 in view of God's mercy that we've seen in Romans offerings offer your whole bodies give everything you've got to God as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to him so what Paul is saying here if it says in Romans 12 1 this is your true and proper worship that you give yourself to God like that and what Paul's saying here is that the thanksgiving offering he gives to God is Gentiles do you see that in the picture it's an extraordinary picture that when he wins

Gentiles for Jesus Christ when they put their faith in Jesus and his death on the cross and the Holy Spirit comes into their lives and transforms them and grows them as disciples Paul sees that as his thanksgiving offering to God rising up to heaven and pleasing God so you see what he's doing Paul is making evangelism our sharing Jesus with friends a new covenant fulfillment fulfillment fulfillment of Old Testament worship in the picture so all over the church today we tend to think of worship as what's confined to our services on a Sunday oh yeah where do you worship oh at St Silas or we can't we think of it as confined to the singing we do when we're gathered on a Sunday and certainly singing is worship or it should be in our hearts as we worship God with our song worship and our coming together our gathering is worship we come together under the word of Christ to give thanks to him to pray to him to confess our sins to encourage each other that's an act of worship but Romans 12 has urged us to see worship as the whole of our lives and here in chapter 15 the apostle Paul is saying that witness to others about Jesus sharing your faith is worship it's an act of worship it's a sacrifice so the motivation for our outreach is the same as our motivation for our all of life worship it's thanksgiving that the more that we see God is merciful to us in what he's done for us the more that we feel thankful to him the more we can express that by sharing what we believe with people around us so that's Paul's motivation it's thankfulness in in worship as he shares the gospel and then he goes on to tell us his method just briefly we notice that the emphasis on proclamation if you look at verse 16 he that is God gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God that's what mission work involves that's the heart of mission lots of things that Christians that we do as Christians today get kind of lumped together in a category that we call mission but Paul here Paul was the greatest missionary in the history of the church and he tells us that the heart of mission is a message that you proclaim it's about proclaiming a message it doesn't need to be just that and mission can involve more with that but mission is about proclaiming the gospel message that's mission and Paul defined for us what the gospel is in Romans in chapter 1 he said it's a message it's the momentous news about who Jesus is that he is the Christ

God's promised king come on a rescue mission from heaven and he is the Lord that he was declared with power by God to be the son of God as God raised him from the dead the gospel is the news of who Jesus is and it's a powerful message it's a message that does something because in 116 he says I'm not ashamed of the gospel it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes so as Paul shares about his ministry here we've got to kind of filter through some things were unique to him he was an apostle and Jesus personally gave him a unique role to take the gospel to the Gentiles and we see that in his description of what he did verse 19 he talks about the signs and wonders that accompanied his ministry and in 2 Corinthians 12 he describes that as a mark of being a true apostle so there's things that were about him then and at the same time once you've read Romans once you've kind of grasped from Paul how much the gospel really matters really that the gospel matters more than anything else our hearts should start to beat to the same rhythm as his that we recognize parts of his vocation were unique and yet we share the same longing that the gospel would advance we're gripped by that last week I was reading the story of John Patton and he was born just under 200 years ago near Dumfries he trained for ministry here in Glasgow and he went then to the islands of the New Hebrides in the South Pacific at the age of 33 33 years old and the last people to arrive on the island he went to had been killed in front of the ship that dropped them off and eaten and he went there to the island of Tanna as far as we know there had been no effective Christian witness to those islands since they'd been discovered no one had ever gone tragically people being born there living there dying there never meeting a Christian never hearing about Jesus so he lands on Tanna with his wife and his son in the November and by the March he had to bury his wife and child because they died they got sick but he stayed on the island for nearly four years in terrible danger to share the gospel and a small number of people became Christians wonderfully and then he was driven off the island he went around Australia and Scotland doing what's called mission mobilization then trying to raise people up to go back with him to the New Hebrides to those islands and then he met a new wife he married again he went back he went to a different island a Niwa and by the time he'd served 15 years on a Niwa the entire island were Christian the whole island put their faith in Christ it was an incredible mission he said that he pleaded with God for the island of a Niwa and then the whole island bowed the knee to Jesus as Savior and as you read about him you think it's striking it wasn't that long ago actually and he grew up not that far from here in a humble Scottish home and the impact he had in his life in his life was extraordinary

I mean it really will echo in eternity won't it as he's there with those people who came to Christ on that island and generations since today those islands are more Christian than Scotland far more Christian and it's partly because of the spiritual legacy that he left those places it's the value of one ordinary person being taken up and gripped by the same vision that Paul had for his life the gospel so back to Paul that's the mission that gripped him and it's a consuming mission it gets in the way of everything else that's our second point the ambition that controlled him so it controlled his emotions if you just look at verse 17 he tells them he says therefore I glory glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God now that word glory is a word that you can translate boast or rejoice it's a kind of similar word it's got that breath so he's saying that this is what I boast in verse 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 now I don't know what you think about that but I think that is a remarkable thing for the apostle Paul to say

Paul is probably the greatest theologian who has ever lived the greatest theologian the church has ever had his letters have shaped the theology and direction of the church ever since he wrote them there's nobody else like him and he won't even speak about that he won't speak of it and he was also a man who had incredible spiritual experiences we know that because he reluctantly speaks of them once in one letter in 2 Corinthians he sets out extraordinary visions and experiences that he was given by the spirit of God but he won't boast in them either he won't glory in them what he will speak of is people coming to faith in Jesus through his work that's what he'll speak about that's where the action is for Paul it controls his emotions and it also controls his plans it controls his itinerary where he goes where he doesn't go so he's never had the chance to visit this church in Rome that he's writing to and he speaks of how he would have loved to have gone but he knew there was a church there so he didn't need to go verse 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 so why can Paul now plan to visit Rome?

[19 : 03] well it's because of that same mission if you look at verse 23 he says but now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions and since I've been longing for many years to visit you I plan to do so when I go to Spain that is not that Paul's off to Benidorm you know it's not that he's thinking mission accomplished I want to go jet skiing it's that Spain is the wild west it's the new frontier for the gospel and Paul has hit the wild east with the gospel all around the eastern Mediterranean the places he mentioned they describe this huge ark from Jerusalem going round round the eastern med round the north all the way round to kind of where Albania is today through Turkey through Greece he's saying I have landed with the gospel in that region my work is done there and now I want to go to that new frontier I want to head to Spain so folks let me ask could we be challenged by this picture of a man whose whole life revolves around gospel mission work people hearing about Jesus for the first time is what controls his emotions his way of life and his plans he was unique as an apostle but today we've inherited the great commission from Jesus the church that's our commission to go and make disciples could that commission to make disciples capture our emotions like it did Paul so that it's what we glory in it's what we speak of to each other if you think about you know when we had exam results day in Scotland a few weeks ago and it was in England this last week so you know maybe if you were involved if you were getting results or classmates or you're a parent or you just saw it on the news what you see obviously sometimes it can be a really hard day but what the news focuses on is these tears of relief and joy as people get what they'd worked for and they finally know where they're going next year or they know what their results will mean for them and there's hugging and there's jumping up and down and there's joy and there's celebration and it's that kind of idea here that we could be that excited as we see the gospel go out through us

St. Silas could it affect our conduct and our travel plans like it did Paul's that his whole life was based around who needs the gospel maybe that would be simple things like when it comes to summer planning planning the summer holidays next summer you know now I know this is the time of year when people start booking their holidays for next summer they think oh when's the next holiday and maybe maybe we think first well what what Christian summer camp am I going to cook on or go and clean on or go and lead on or are my children going to go on so that that's locked in the diary first and I'll build my summer around that and where for many of us going overseas like Paul did or John Patton did where that wouldn't be possible or it wouldn't be appropriate where that's the case and that is the case for lots of us could we like Paul though see that as a little bit of a disappointment actually that God never called us to the frontier for the gospel because our mentality is the gospel frontiers are where the real action is that's where God is really busy today

I was struck by that when we had Rod Thomas here a few months ago who's based in Sendai in Japan and he came to a prayer meeting and he preached for us on a Sunday and he talked about his church and he had photos of it in Sendai and I thought you know what I'd find it really hard to be in that church it's really small I bet the music's rubbish you know and I bet it's not very comfortable and they have trouble getting a building and rent's really expensive and because it's small it feels vulnerable and not viable and he said he said you know it's a great privilege to be one of God's people anywhere it is a great privilege to shine like a star anywhere as you hold firmly to the word of life but it is a really immense privilege it's a much greater privilege to shine where that light is in a very dark place where you're the only light shining for Jesus Christ very powerful he sees it as a privilege to be in Sendai could we think like that about the gospel frontiers today if you think about where they are

Afghanistan Oman Kazakhstan Laos Sub-Saharan Africa France the west of France Spain Italy gospel frontiers where people don't know Christ and could it control our conduct here in Glasgow you know there's a great there's a great I was reading I was planning growth groups for this term and I was reading some notes and it was this growth group kind of study you could do we're not doing it this term I'm sure we'll do it one day where these notes they said just imagine with your growth group with your small group that you're part of a church planting team in Spain so you've moved to Spain with a team to share Jesus Christ discuss with your group what criteria will you use to decide where you live how are you going to approach secular employment what standard of living will you expect as a pioneer missionary how much money do you need to live on what are you going to spend your time doing in this place where you've gone for mission what are your prayers going to be like what are you going to pray for now that you've moved your whole life there and then in the notes it said you're just as much a missionary where you live today as if you've been part of a team in Spain mission is the central purpose for us as God's people wherever we are so do your answers to those kind of questions do they describe your life as you're living it now inspiring so back to Paul we've thought about the ambition that controlled him the project sorry the what have we thought about the ambition that controlled him and now we're going to think about the churches that supported him so Paul's this incredible man but he's not a lone ranger and he needs churches not just to see what he's doing but to join him and that's the challenge for us as a church that as we read what Paul describes churches doing for him here we see in a way three different ways we can help the cause of mission when we know people who are going to hard places with the gospel he mentions pounds partnership and prayer so the pounds come in verse 24 he implies it really if you look at verse 24 because he's polite he says

I hope to see you while passing through on the way to Spain and that you will assist me on my journey there after I've enjoyed your company for a while he means financially they'll support him so that when he gets to Spain he's not going to have to work for a living if possible he will have the support just to devote himself to sharing Jesus then the partnership comes in verse 25 this takes just a little bit of thinking about so verse 25 something interrupts his mission verse 25 he says now however I'm on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there for Macedonia and Achaia that's the churches there were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem they were pleased to do it and indeed they owe it to them for if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews spiritual blessings they owe it to the Jews to share with them in their material blessings now as you read that

[26 : 45] I think that's a bit of a surprise Paul sharing what he's doing next if people in Spain haven't yet heard of Jesus why does Paul let this delivery of famine relief to churches in Jerusalem interrupt and delay his mission there I mean of course it's important it's essential that it happens but could he not have found someone else to do that delegated to some deacons to go and deliver that famine relief the reason that Paul has to do it is because this is no ordinary work of mercy this is a vital opportunity for the early church to demonstrate to each other and to the world that the gospel really is for all nations so at the time that Paul's on mission there are churches where people are in there suspicious of Paul's gospel message that anybody of any nation even if they're not Jewish can come to faith in Christ and be saved that's in danger of infecting the churches that mentality and so if Paul can get this collection that the Gentile churches have made for Jewish people in need and if he can get the Jewish churches to receive it it will vindicate his message that the gospel is for the nations it's for everyone that it unites us to be a new man in Jesus Christ so Paul's willing to interrupt his mission for this project because of the gospel unity it displays so thinking about that for us today it's about us showing that the gospel has reshaped our lives it's about us expressing our unity with other Christians and other churches that believe the same gospel as us that that unity goes across racial divides across class divides across geographical divides if we do that together it sends a powerful message to the world that it's the Christian faith that brings people together that unites people so that's the partnership we've thought about the pounds to support Paul the partnership from churches but the churches also support him in prayer and he says that in verse 30 he says if you have a look at verse 30

I urge you brothers and sisters by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the spirit to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there so that I may come to you with joy by God's will and in your company be refreshed there's that strong word there I urge you he urged us at the beginning of chapter 12 he urges us here he urges them to join his struggle through prayer so the mark of a healthy local church is that every person is involved in global mission for Jesus Christ because we're either being sent ourselves willingly voluntarily cheerfully going somewhere new or we're struggling in prayer for the people who have gone to the nations with the gospel maybe you could choose to do that today to respond to the passage just resolve to take one of our mission partners they're on the board there at the back and think

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