

ROMANS

Part 30: “The Enduring Mission of God”

Romans 15:14–33

By David A. Ritchie

Sunday, October 30, 2022 (Ordinary Time)

Scripture Reading

“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. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given 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. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. 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, 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; 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, but as it is written, ‘Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.’ This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 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, 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. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and 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 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. May the God of peace be with you all. Amen” (Rom 15:14–33).

Introduction

This fall, I have been reading a book by S.C. Gwynne entitled *Empire of the Summer Moon*. It’s a fascinating history of the rise and fall of the Comanche peoples that once roamed the great plains of the West Texas panhandle, where our city now stands.

The book recounts the violent wars that once raged and the severe hardships people faced in a wilderness that has only recently hosted cities and established communities. On a planet where people have lived in the same place for hundreds and even thousands of years, it is truly remarkable that *we* live in a place that has only known permanent settlements for the last one hundred and fifty years.

Except for a few rivers and canyons, much of this land is a vast ocean of plains without the resources of water, trees, and natural landmarks. Most of the survival skills that would allow someone to survive in the woodlands of the eastern United States suddenly became useless in a place like West Texas. The sheer harshness of this landscape shows how resilient and daring the Comanches and the early settlers of this region were.

On my mother's side of the family, I have a great-great-grandfather named Earnest Asbury Upfold (show image [1EA Upfold](#)). He came to Texas from Indiana in the early 1880s. Together he built a house with his dad near Red River and watched as a Tornado “*tore it to pieces.*” As a young man, he once met Quanah Parker, and as an older man, he became the fourth-ever sheriff of Randall County.

In his written memoirs, he recounts how when he first came to the city of Canyon, a dugout trench surrounded the county courthouse. Apparently, a cowboy had been spreading rumors that nearby Indians were plotting a raid, and consequently, fear had gripped the small town.

I often think about how our lives are separated by not even a century, yet they are so different. In many ways, my life is built on the foundation that my great-great-grandfather—and others like him—laid.

The people who gave birth to places like Amarillo, Canyon, and the surrounding towns did not build upon any pre-established settlements. They were laying the foundations of something they hoped would long outlast their lifetimes. They were *pioneers*.

In the same way, the apostles of Jesus Christ were more than religious leaders or theologians. They were *pioneers of the gospel*. They were taking great risks with great uncertainty. They were forging something new and laying the foundations of something that would far outlast their lifetimes. Our passage today gives us a glimpse of the pioneer nature and the pioneer mentality of the early church.

As the book of Romans draws closer to its conclusion, Paul will become increasingly more personal. He is no longer focused on abstract theological ideas and doctrines. Instead, Paul is now recounting the nature of his own unlikely ministry. And it is in understanding Paul's mission that we are reminded of the church's mission and the role *we* have been given to play in the story of redemption.

So, today, we will examine “[The Enduring Mission of God](#)” as we look into the latter half of Romans chapter 15. And we will divide our discussion into two headings: we will

examine 1.) *Paul and the Mission of God*, 2.) *The Church and the Mission of God*, and 3.) *Suffering and the Mission of God*.

Exposition

1.) Paul and the Mission of God

If you have followed along with us this year, as we have journeyed through the book of Romans, you would probably agree that this letter is quite *bold* in what it intends to accomplish.

Paul has never worshipped among the Christians in Rome. But despite his lack of relationship with this church. He has no qualms about confronting them with their absolute spiritual need for the gospel. He has zero shame in unfolding the magnificent truths of justification, sanctification, and the hope of eternal glory. He has no problem making authoritative pronouncements about the mysteries of God's sovereign power. He does not hesitate in giving direct commands regarding how the Christians of Rome should relate to one another and even defer to one another in Christian love.

If you were one of the leaders of the Roman church, and you received a letter as long and complex as Romans, you might very well be tempted to ask: "*Who does this guy Paul think he is? Why does he feel compelled to write us the things he is writing? Does this guy not know that we have already heard and believe in the gospel?*"

Paul knows his letter might come across as a bit strong and presumptuous. And that is why he writes, "*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. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder...*" (Rom 15:14–15a).

The Christians of Rome know the Christ, they worship Jesus, and they trust Christ. They are fully able to instruct one another and encourage one another in Christ. Yet, through this letter the Apostle Paul has displayed how Christ is deeper still. Paul has written Romans not to introduce something *new* but to impart a reminder of what is *true*.

Paul has taken the magnificent truths of gospel and unfolded how it is deeply relevant to the very issues and challenges that face the church of Rome. He has shown how Christ is their peace amidst the threats and hostility from an external culture that is prone to misunderstand them. Christ is their solution to their internal tensions that threaten to divide them. Christ is their hope amidst the uncertainty of their future.

So too, for us, Paul has called us throughout this letter to not only believe in the gospel, but to see all of our lives in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. It is in Christ that we will find peace in the midst of global war, economic woes, racial tension, and political polarization. It is in Christ that we will find the wisdom to steward our money and find purpose in our vocations. It is in Christ that we will find the power to love our enemies. It is in Christ we discover the grace that strengthens marriages,

families, and friendships. It is in Christ that we are reconciled to God and made to become more like him.

From the youngest baby Christian to the wisest saint who has walked with Christ for decades, *we never grow beyond the gospel*. We never grow beyond needing to be reminded of the gospel through sermons and songs and prayers and the gift of relationships we find in the Christian community.

In other words, Paul is not speaking down to the Romans by reminding them of the truth of the gospel. The gospel is the truth that saves; the truth that sanctifies; the truth that is the very fountain of our eternal hope and glory.

Nevertheless, Paul is also reminding the Roman Christians that he does possess a specific apostolic authority and a commissioned ministry that comes from God. He writes, *“But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given 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. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God”* (Rom 15:15–17).

In this way, Paul’s own life is a testimony to the transforming power of the gospel. After all, Paul was once a cultural chauvinist and a Jewish nationalist. He persecuted Christians and despised gentiles. But Jesus saved this former Pharisee. Now, Paul has been chosen to be God’s instrument through whom God’s name will be carried unto the nations (cf. Acts 9:15). Since the church of Rome is a predominantly gentile (or non-Jewish) church, Paul feels an obligation to have care and concern for the church of Rome, even though he has never been there.

Paul’s very life and ministry remind us the gospel does not just inspire us to become better people. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the gospel transforms us into new people. Even more, Paul’s life shows us *gospel transformation demands missional participation*.

He tells the Christians of Rome, *“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, 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; 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, but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand”* (Rom 15:18–21).

Paul has preached in places like Jerusalem, Damascus, Antioch, Asia Minor, and Greece. He has witnessed conversions, laid the foundations of new churches, and disciplined new leaders to care for those new churches. Yet, the mission of God compels him to share the gospel with those who have yet to hear and yet to believe in the good news of what Christ has accomplished.

And even though we are separated from Paul by language, cultural background, and long centuries, this same task is going forward. We are part of the same story. This is why we train leaders and multiply gospel communities. This is why we invest in church-planting residencies and the planting of new churches. In fact, through our partnership with the Redeemer Network of churches, we have helped fund, train, and send over twenty church planters who have gone on to plant more than twenty new churches.

Like the old pioneers of West Texas, the people of God have been invited into the extraordinary adventure of being pioneers of the gospel. And we have the privilege of participating in this mission when we connect, when we give, and when we serve within the local church.

2.) The Church and the Mission of God

Paul is not the only one who has a role to play in the mission of God. The church of Rome is a part of this story as well.

He writes: *“This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 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, 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. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ”* (Rom 15:22–29).

We know from the book of Acts and other letters of the New Testament that Paul is an ambitious missionary. But here, we see just how ambitious Paul truly is for the sake of the gospel.

He has set his heart on Spain (Σπανίαν).¹ Today, we would recognize Spain (and the Iberian peninsula) as the westernmost edge of Europe. But in the Hebrew mind and the ancient world of the Mediterranean, Spain represented something more—*it was the very end of the earth*.

In fact, when the Old Testament prophet Jonah attempted to run away from the call of God by fleeing to the end of the world, he books passage on a boat that is headed

¹ There is no indication that Paul ever ministered in Spain. Yet, this does not mean his desire to go to Spain was not inspired by God. As N.T. Wright notes, “Perhaps God sometimes allows us to dream dreams of what he wants us to do, not necessarily so that we can fulfil all of them—that might just make us proud and self-satisfied—but so that we will take the first steps towards fulfilling them.”¹

towards the land of “Tarshish,” which was the ancient Hebrew name for Spain (Jonah 1:3; cf. Gen 10:4).

Likewise, in the beginning of the book of Acts, just before the ascension of Christ, Jesus commands his disciples to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Paul has internalized and personalized this command. Until he draws his last breath, he has no intent on stopping his mission. By setting his gaze upon Spain, he shows that he is committed to bringing the gospel to the very ends of the earth.

For this reason, Paul expresses that he has long desired to visit the church of Rome. But he does not simply desire to see the imperial capital as a tourist on holiday. Sure, he wants to enjoy the company of his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are in Rome, as does he want to encourage and strengthen them by ministering to them. However, he also wants to mobilize the church in Rome to be a missions hub. He wants to galvanize the Christians of Rome to pray for, resource, and even send missionaries, as the gospel advances into the regions of western Europe, in places like modern-day France and Spain.

Again this is not all that different than how the church seeks to bring the gospel into new regions today. For example, our church partners with an initiative known as 100-UPGs. 100 UPGs is an international missions collaborative dedicated to making Christian disciples and planting churches among 100 unreached people groups (UPGs) within what is known as the “10/40 Window” (show [image 2 10-40 Window](#)). The 10/40 Window is a common term in the world of missions that refers to the geographical area between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north in the eastern hemisphere. This region is home to the majority of people groups in the world who have been unreached by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Likewise, 100 UPGs has two hub cities that they use as training and mobilization centers. From Bangkok, Thailand, they train and mobilize mission teams to minister in Asia and the Indian subcontinent. From Barcelona, Spain, they train and mobilize mission teams to minister in northern Africa and the Middle East. Again, this is what Paul is inviting the church of Rome to become.

In this way, you can also read the book of Romans not only as a theological treatise. It is also, arguably, the best missionary support letter ever written. Paul has revealed the power and glory of the gospel, in part, because he wants to invite the Roman church to support the advance of the gospel to those who do not yet believe.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not just good news for us. The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for all. And we all—as members of the church of Jesus Christ—have a role to play in the gospel going into the nations.

The apostle is reminding the church of Rome, as well as the church of all ages, that the mission of God is something that emanates from the church of God. We must never divorce the church from mission nor mission from the church. Paul is, thus, saying to

the Christians of Rome, “Yes, you have a role to play in reaching your city. But I want you to see and embrace your place as a church in reaching the nations!” This is why our mission of Redeemer Christian Church includes not just a local but a *global* aspect. Our mission is: *Redeemer Christian Church exists to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ with our words and display the gospel of Jesus Christ with our lives to our neighbors and to the nations.*

So, how do everyday people living in West Texas, working as engineers, teachers, social workers, medical professionals, and parents, practically participate in the mission of God to the nations? Again, it is not all that different from how the Christians of Rome participated in the mission of God.

Firstly, we pray for the nations. We pray that unreached people groups will be reached. We pray that the church will be strengthened in challenging contexts. We pray for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. We pray that word of the gospel would go forth and not return void (cf. Isa 55:11). We pray that the Holy Spirit would shine light in the darkness and breathe the gift of life where there is death.

Secondly, we encourage those who are committed to the daily work of mission to the nations at home and abroad. Encourage people like Ryan and Crystal Pennington (and the several members of Redeemer who also serve on staff at the Refugee Language Project), as they care for and share Christian compassion with people from faraway and war-torn nations. Encourage our brother Luke Finch and the leaders and volunteers of Redeemer who serve with Amarillo Young Life as they seek to reach unreached teenagers and students. Encourage Barbara Howard and the wonderful people of Amarillo Children Home, as they love, care for, and foster children in our community. Encourage Milton and Barbie Jones of Christian Relief Fund as they feed and educate orphans throughout the world. Encourage Ryan and Christi Rush of Chosen Surgical Network as they give sight to the blind.

Every one of these missions seeks to reach the unreached. Every one of these missions cares about declaring and displaying the gospel. And every one of these missions is led by people from our church family and supported financially by our church family. The impact that our little church is having on our city and our world is *astounding*; and by "our church," I mean not just the organization that is Redeemer—but the *people* who are Redeemer.

This is why it is not a burden to give generously and sacrificially to the local church. We give to the local church joyously to support the mission of God that emanates from the church. This is why giving in the New Testament is something that is always primarily associated with the church.

So, if you have given to support the mission of Redeemer Christian Church, thank you. Your giving is supporting ministry in our city, our region, and far away nations that is far beyond the four walls of this church and far beyond our own lifetimes.

Right now, there is a network of churches in Kenya that carry the name Redeemer Christian Church because ten years ago we helped plant one church that went on to plant a church that planted a church that planted a church. I pray that if the Lord tarries in his coming, generations of Christians in Kenya will come to faith in Christ through such churches.

We do not know if Paul ever made it to Spain, but we do know that the gospel did. Last May, my wife and I traveled to Spain, and we stayed in an old hotel across from the Cathedral of Barcelona (show image [3Cathedral Exterior](#))).

During our first day there, we walked inside the medieval church beneath the vaulted ceilings of heavy stones (show [4Cathedral Altar](#)). We sat among the pews next to the altar, and I noticed two centuries-old wooden boxes to my right along the wall. I went to examine them when I discovered that these boxes contained the bones of the count and countess, who first sponsored the construction of this church (show image [5Coffins of the Counts and Countesses of Barcelona](#)). The church was consecrated in the year 1058. Yet, it was not completed until 1448.

I considered how amazing it is for a couple to have the vision to invest in the church they knew they would be able to see with their own eyes. To build a cathedral was to see even beyond your children and grandchildren. To build a cathedral was to make a sacrifice for the sake of the gospel that would be a blessing to your grandchildren's grandchildren.

I couldn't help but think how vastly different this mindset is from a culture that can barely imagine a future beyond the next financial quarter or election cycle.

I pray that we Christians today could have eyes to see such a vision. I pray that we would give toward, work toward, and pray toward seeing a vision of the kingdom of God that is profoundly bigger than any one of us.

3.)Suffering and the Mission of God

In the final portion of our text, we learn Paul wants to come to Rome, but first, he must go back to Jerusalem. The church of Jerusalem is poor, and the region has been struck by a severe famine. Yet, in the earliest days of Christianity, the Christians of Judea sold all their lands and possessions to resource the mission of the church. Thus, Paul is returning to Jerusalem to give a gift to the church of Jerusalem from the churches of Greece, Macedonia, and Asia Minor. As the church of Judea shared spiritual blessings with the gentile world, the church of the gentile world will now come to the aid of their brother in sisters who are in need. ²

However, Paul knows many in Judea oppose his mission to the nations. They don't want people from other ethnicities to be a part of the community of God's people. Paul knows he will encounter resistance. So, for this reason, he asks for prayer.

² Wright, *Romans, Part 2*, 127–128.

He pleads with the Romans, *"I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and 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 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. May the God of peace be with you all. Amen"* (Rom 15:30–33).

Paul will indeed come to Rome, but he will arrive by a different way than he intends. For the book of Acts tells us when he comes to Jerusalem, he will be mobbed, beaten, imprisoned, and sent away on a boat that will be shipwrecked (see: Acts 21–28). Paul will make it to Rome, but he will have to await trial in Rome while under house arrest. Yet, while the Apostle Paul himself is bound, the power of the gospel is unbound.

So too, we need to know that our best-laid plans for ministry will be interrupted. Sometimes we encounter problems. Sometimes we encounter pain. Sometimes we encounter pandemics. For to faithfully follow Jesus will often require sacrifice and suffering. But even in the dark valleys, the shepherd of our souls is with us (cf. Ps 23:4).

I find it interesting that when Paul describes his ministry to those who have yet to hear the good news, in verse 21, he quotes a passage from Isaiah that is part of the song of the Suffering Servant. In context, Isaiah's prophecy ultimately points towards the suffering of Christ that makes salvation possible.

Jesus is the one who was "despised and rejected by men." He is the "man of sorrows" who has "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." He is the one who was "pierced for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities." At the cross, Jesus endured "the chastisement that [brought] us peace" (see: Isa 52:13–53:12).

Yet, here in Romans 15, Paul is connecting his own ministry to that of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52 and 53. Is this blasphemy? No. Paul knows that to suffer for Christ is to suffer with Christ (cf. Rom 8:17). He knows that it is in giving that we receive (Acts 20:35) and that in losing our lives, we find them (Matt 10:39).

So, yes, the mission of God is costly. But the mission of God is worth it because Jesus is worth it. He has redeemed us so that we might participate in his enduring mission of redemption. For the God who *saves* us is also the God who *sends* us.

Conclusion

So, Redeemer Christian Church, may we endure in this mission. May we see the privilege and worth of God's work in this world. May we find our place in this mission through our prayers, our service, and our generosity. May devote our lives in service to the ultimate Servant, Christ Jesus, who suffered so that we might be redeemed.

AMEN.

Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities

- 1.) Read Romans 15:14–16. Paul tells the Romans he has written this letter with boldness "by way of reminder" (15:15.) In what ways has Paul's letter to the Romans served as a powerful "reminder" of the gospel? Why is it so important for Christians to be regularly reminded of the gospel?
- 2.) Read Romans 15:17–21. What does this passage show us about Paul's ministry, particularly his ministry to the nations (see also: Acts 9:15–16)?
- 3.) Read Romans 15:22–33. In this passage, we learn of Paul's desire to bring the gospel to Spain. We also learn of Paul's desire for the church of Rome to help him in this mission to Spain. How does this remind us of the church's enduring mission to the nations, and what are tangible ways that members of a local church can participate in the global mission of God?