

Paul's Missionary Ambition and the Church Today

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Preacher: Will Brooks

[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Good to be together with you this morning, have the opportunity to worship together.

As Pastor Brian said, my name is Will Brooks, and I serve at Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary. I serve there as the provost, academic dean, and the director of our doctor of missiology programs and intercultural studies programs there.

My family and I, we have three kids, my wife and I, and we've lived in Penang for about three years. Sorry, eight years. I don't know why I said three. We've lived there for eight years, and yeah, we love Malaysia.

I'm thankful to have the opportunity to come here and be with you this weekend, especially because it gives me the opportunity to have another bowl of Sarawak Laksa, which I think we can all agree is the best Laksa in the world.

Amen? Amen. Amen. All right. Yeah, I mean, one other thing about me that I didn't mention yesterday was that one thing a lot of people know about me and a lot of my friends immediately think of when they think of me is that I'm an avid runner, and my love for running borderline.

[1 : 38] I love to run, especially trails. And so, again, thankful to be in Malaysia where there's so many great trails to run.

I've been to Sarawak a couple times before, both times to participate in trail races. And so, yeah, somewhat humorously.

The first time I came was a few years ago before the pandemic, and I participated in a 50-kilometer Spartan race. If you know what Spartan race is, it has, you know, you run, and then there's all these obstacles that you have to do.

You've got to climb over a wall and pick up a heavy object and carry it. And we were out in the jungle. And I got sunburned really bad, really, really bad sunburned.

And that was a Saturday, and I was preaching at a church on Sunday. So there I was trying to put this shirt and tie on over my sunburn.

[2 : 46] It was not a good experience. But happy to be here again and to be with all of you today. And our task for the next few minutes is to look at Romans chapter 15, which we've already read.

And since this is your missions weekend, we want to think about that concept, that idea. What is it that we're talking about when we talk about the church's mission?

And when we think about the work of missions and the work of missionaries around the world, what is it that we have in mind? What is it that we are envisioning?

And Romans 15, in Romans 15, Paul unpacks his mission and his ambition, and it sheds light on the church's mission today.

But we can start by thinking about missions and thinking about this concept of missions and in some sense defining the term when we say that the work of missions, quite simply, is the intentional cross-cultural communication of the gospel.

[4 : 03] So the intentionality there, when we see that the gospel will not, because of cultural barriers or linguistic barriers, will often not naturally flow from one person to another if there are those linguistic and cultural barriers, which there often are between different groups of people.

So there's this intentionality in crossing those barriers. And for the sake of the church, it's driven by, as we'll see in Romans 15, this intentionality to take the gospel across those barriers is really driven by a burden for those people to know our Lord.

So as we come to Romans 15, Paul will unpack this a bit for us in explaining his own ministry and what we see here when we begin to think about the task of missions, the work of missions that the church has and has had for many centuries, the first thing we see here is the aim of missions.

The aim of missions. We see that in verse 16. If you have a copy of God's Word, you can look there. In verses 15 and 16, Paul says, I've written to you to remind you of some points the grace of God given to me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serving as a priest of the gospel of God.

God's purpose is that the Gentiles may be an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. What is the aim of missions?

[5 : 54] What is it that we have in mind when we think about the work of missions and the missionary task? The aim or the intention is that the Gentiles may be an acceptable offering before God.

Now, what does that mean? Let's unpack that phrase a little bit. What is Paul referring to there? Well, in Paul's mind and in the New Testament period, there are really two types of people in the world.

There were Jews and there were Gentiles. And that was it. And we know that throughout the Old Testament, the Jews were God's people and the Gentiles were outside of God's people.

But in Christ, God worked in a unique way to bring about salvation for all peoples in the world. We see that promise throughout the Old Testament that this would come about, that God would send His church and would bless all the nations that He created through the Messiah.

And so we see, of course, in Matthew 28 and in other places where when Christ had risen from the dead and before His ascension, He told His disciples and He told the church that this was their task to go and make disciples of all nations or make disciples of the Gentiles.

[7 : 19] And in the book of Acts, continuing forward in Scripture, in the book of Acts, we see the church doing that. We see Paul and Peter and others going to the nations with the message of who Jesus was and what He had accomplished.

And this Paul explains to us that this was God's intention and the ministry that God had given to him, and not just to him, but also to the church, to us as well, to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

That they might be an acceptable offering to God. In other words, that they might, with us and with Paul and every other believer, might be brought into the family of God.

Now, as we look out on the world today, we probably would give a little bit more specificity to that term of Gentiles, recognizing that that's a broad term that encompasses a lot of different ethnicities in the world that we live in.

In fact, in South Asia, in India alone, there are thousands of different, separate them into, you know, thousands of different ethnicities there, based on linguistic and cultural differences, which we recognize is a challenge to us.

[8 : 50] It's a challenge to the church as we seek to take the gospel to all of those peoples. But that is the task that is given to us, and it should be our burden when we look at Scripture and we think historically about the ways that the gospel has been passed to us.

At some point in history, someone came here and brought the gospel to us, and now responsibility falls on us to take the gospel to others.

Both those who are near us geographically and near us culturally, and also those who are far from us.

That's also a responsibility that God has given to us. God's desire is that all peoples, all the people that He has created might know Him and have a relationship with Him.

And this is what Paul means when he says that the Gentiles might be an acceptable offering to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 01] And what that looks like is that as the church sends out missionaries to various parts of the world, these missionaries, they go and they go to various places. And again, with intentionality crossing these cultural and linguistic barriers, they learn the language, they learn the culture there for the sole purpose and specific task of communicating the message of who Jesus Christ is as God's anointed one to these people.

And they share the gospel with them, and they lead them to faith in Christ, and they gather them into churches, so that together with us on a regular basis, they will join with us in the worship of the one true God.

And they might turn away from false religions and idols that man has created to know the one true and living God.

Of course, this is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify them and bring them into the knowledge of God.

And so when we think about the missionary task, and we think about the missionaries that we support, and we think about what it is that the church should be about until Christ comes, this is the aim.

[11 : 23] That the church should have this burden. As we talked about last night, we look at the world that we live in, and we look around at the world, and we recognize that all the people in the world are created in the image of God and are of value to God and deserve the opportunity to hear the gospel in their lifetime.

And that responsibility of taking the gospel to them falls on us as the church. Now that doesn't mean that all of us are going to go. It doesn't mean that all of us are going to pack up all of our belongings and move to another part of the world.

It does mean that with some level of intentionality, we should be involved in evangelism with those who live near us and those that we come into contact with.

And it does mean that we, together, as people who walk with the Lord, we share a burden together for the world around us.

We desire and we labor, though in different ways, for each one of us has a different calling and a different set of gifts. We all labor together and we share this burden that all the people that God has created might have an opportunity to know Him and have a relationship with Him.

[12 : 50] And when we look on Romans 11 and see where, again, Paul is sort of unpacking for us his missionary ambition and helping us to understand the mission of the church and what it means for us, we see the aim of missions.

We also see what we might call the methods. The methods of missions here. Look with me in verses 18 and 19.

Paul says, I would, as he describes his own ministry, I would dare not say anything except what Christ has accomplished through me by word and deed for the obedience of the Gentiles.

By the power of miraculous signs and wonders and by the power of God's Spirit. And as a result, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum.

So we see here what Paul says and we may think about this and we may say, hey, you know what? When I think about the work of missionaries and sometimes missionaries themselves might echo the same refrain, we say, you know, when I look at Scripture and I read through the book of Acts and I see all that Paul did and all that the early church did and all that they accomplished, and I can't do that.

[14 : 18] When we think about missions and this calling that God gives to us to share the gospel with our neighbors or to go to other parts of the world and learn their language for the sake of communicating the gospel with them and we say, I'm not Paul.

I can't do that. But what does Paul say to us this morning? It's not about me. It's not about Paul. It's not about how good I am or how wise I am or how I knew how to handle every situation that I face. What does he say? I will not boast.

I dare not say anything except what Christ has accomplished through me. And so when we look at the work of missions and we think about the task of the church, there's certainly a sense in which we may be overwhelmed.

In fact, we spent some time yesterday thinking about some of the challenges related to the church's missionary task. We spent some time thinking about issues like how to communicate the gospel in culturally relevant ways.

[15 : 36] without losing the gospel in the process. Or the challenge of orality and literacy and other things as well.

And we might think, man, this is really a challenging task. And it is. And it is. When we think about the need to take the gospel to the world, we think about many of the parts of the world which still lack access to the gospel, they're not easy places to get to.

They're not easy places to live. But what does Paul say to us? What Christ has accomplished through me.

The primary calling of the missionary is dependence on Christ. In fact, that is true for all of us. The primary responsibility and the primary task that we have as believers and followers of Christ is dependence on Christ.

And hopefully, we would echo that refrain. Whether you are whether you are you know, in business and you work at a bank or whether you're an architect or whether you're a teacher, whether you're an engineer, whether you're a doctor, whether you're a janitor, whether you're a bus driver or missionary.

[17 : 10] We look at our lives and what should we say? May I never boast except in what Christ has accomplished through me.

Dependence on Christ is what He asks of us. So we may look at and think about and often times we hear this when we think about the work of missions or the missionaries that we support and we hear about their work and hear about the kinds of things that they are dealing with or when we think about you know, having to move to another place and learn a language or learn a new culture and new ways of living to be able to communicate well and we say, I could never do that.

And you're exactly right. None of us in our own strength could ever do that except what Christ accomplishes through me.

And so when we think about the task of missions, it's not about what our missionaries can accomplish through the church. It's not about when we think about maybe sending people out or going on a short-term trip or doing the work of missions or even in local missions when we think about the needs around us and God's calling to be involved in that.

Perhaps even you have family members or friends or co-workers who need to hear the Gospel. Man, I don't know the Gospel that well.

[19 : 00] I don't know how to answer all their questions. I don't know how to... What does Paul say? Accept what Christ accomplishes through me.

For some reason, in God's wisdom and in His plan, He desires to work through the church. Through people like you and me.

It's a mystery. It's a mystery to us why God chooses to work that way. But this is God's means. This is God's means to work through us.

Broken people. Broken vessels. But God displays His power and weakness in this way. Accept what through Christ accomplishes through me.

This is the means. This is the process by which God accomplishes His mission. He uses us, but it's not really us. It's what Christ accomplishes through us.

[20 : 12] Third, we see here with Paul, when we look at Romans 15, we see the missionary ambition. We've seen the aim or the goal of missions is to see that all people have an opportunity to hear and can be an acceptable offering.

We've seen the means is Christ working through us and we see the ambition which should be shared not only by those who have this unique calling to be intentional in moving across cultural barriers or living in this way.

It's not a unique calling to the missionary, but it is the church's ambition in verse 20 where Paul says, my aim is to preach the gospel where Christ has not been named.

Right? And this echoes with what we saw in verse 16. the desire to see the gospel go to those areas in which it's never been before.

And this is why missionaries and mission organizations and mission scholars often talk about concepts like unreached people groups and another term unengaged unreached people groups these different ethnic groups around the world in which there are very few believers.

[21 : 53] Less than 2% of their population is evangelical Christians and in many of those locations there are no churches. And so we recognize that part of the church's task is to figure out how can we get the gospel there.

And this is Paul's burden and it is a shared burden of the church to be concerned about this and to feel the weight and the burden by this reality that there are still many places in the world that have no access to the gospel.

There are parts of the world where there are no churches. There are very few believers. people, even if they were interested and had a desire to hear the gospel, there's no one that speaks their language who could communicate it with them.

This is a burden that rests on the church as a whole but it's also a unique burden for some people in such a way that they say I'm going to reorient my life and live in such a way make it the aim of my life as Paul says to do everything I can to see that those people have access to the gospel.

This is a unique calling of some that we call missionaries and we send them out and support them and try to help them so that they may go and accomplish that goal.

[23 : 29] Now often times when we think about these people that still lack access to the gospel we may wonder in the world that we live in with high speed internet and all these things how are there still people out there that don't have access to the gospel I mean like there's nowhere you can go in the world where you can't find coca-cola how is it that we've gotten coca-cola to everywhere but we've not gotten the gospel there in fact just a couple of weeks ago I was in Nepal working with some of my co-workers there and we were trekking up in the Himalayas and we drove we left Kathmandu we drove for about 12 hours on these on these just crazy roads you know up and down huge cliff on the side of the of the of the road my my nerves were were shot by the time we got to our our our destination and we we finally we got there we we drove about as far as you can drive about to where the road ends and then then we put our backpacks on and we started we started climbing and so me me and my my boys we we traveled out there and we were with these with these co-workers and we had a we had a group of of Nepali believers that were that were with us and we were we were trekking up high into the into the

Himalayas and we we visited a number of these villages remote villages in fact we we then you know we drove to the end of the road and then we trekked for days to try to get up into where some of these villages were and we we got up to to to one to one place this one village at about 4,000 meters above above sea level and no no known believers among this village not not a large population that lives there but but but no church and and and and no believers among among that people not an easy place to get to they did have they did have Coca-Cola up there but there's there's no there's no gospel and the these these Nepali believers that were that were with us they they are they are in the process of becoming trekking guides where they can take teams out into into these areas and guide teams up there and and so part of part of what we're doing was was training training them and and how to do that and what to pay attention to and and things like that but we got up we got up into this into this village and they just said man these there's no believers here this is this is this is heartbreaking and they were they were they were they were really broken with the realization that there are so many of these villages so far away in such a remote place so difficult to access and yet there's no there's no believers there and there's no there's no churches there and there's there's so few people who who desire to go and get the gospel there thankfully after our trip many of them were were burdened to to go back and try to take the gospel there interesting as well another aspect of the of the of the challenge there this was a high up in the himalayan this is a tibetan village but they didn't speak pure tibetan and they didn't speak nepali their language is something in the middle of of of both so even even uh many of our our guides struggle to communicate well with with the people there which again is a reminder of of why it's so difficult to get the gospel to some of these some of these places but this is the this is the ambition this is the calling of some and as we see in the rest of this passage our our point number four those who have this ambition to preach the gospel where

Christ has not been named for the the rest of us we have this shared calling we have a shared calling because we we recognize that that this is the work of the church until Christ returns and we see here for example in verse 24 Paul writes to the church in in Rome and he says I hope I hope to see you as I pass by you on my way to Spain and I hope to be helped by you to be assisted by you and this is probably Paul's uh subtle way of saying I need your financial assistance I need to be helped by you I need to be assisted in my journey on my way there the work of missions is a is a shared task it is the responsibility of the whole church and though though a few are sent out with this kind of intentionality to go to the hard places to go to the difficult places those that we say have the calling of missionaries and in some sense all of us are sent all of us are witnesses of Christ and have been given this task to share the gospel with those we come in contact with whether they be similar to us culturally or different from us culturally all of us have this responsibility to bear witness to what God has done in our life and to bear witness to what we see in the scriptures about who Jesus Christ is and yet there are some who have this unique calling to be even more intentional to orient their lives around that calling to go to the hard places the difficult places but not just the most remote villages in Nepal but also the mega cities of the world where there are few churches also a difficult place to be and to live and to share the gospel and plant churches the task of the church calling of these who were sent out this is a shared burden a shared task for the church all of us must work together in this task and this is why

Paul says look I want to come I want to spend time with you I want to see you and I need to be helped by you though Paul shares this unique burden to go where Christ has not been named he can't do it on his own he needs the rest of the church in fact he even says he goes on further as we spent time thinking about last night in verse 30 plead with you and I appeal to you to strive together with me in prayer that's the picture of the church that embraces a shared task strive together with me I recognize that a few are called to go and to live with this kind of intentionality and orient their lives around this kind of work not all of us are but even if we aren't we should strive together in the task because of the burden that we share that all the people that God has made deserve an opportunity to hear the gospel and respond to it for me

[32 : 13] I'm a little bit of a world war two nut I love reading about world war two and both of my both of my grandfathers served in in the in the pacific in that in that war and recently my family and I had the opportunity I had been there once before but this is the first time for the rest of my family had the opportunity to go to visit France we went up to Normandy where the D-Day landings were and spent time visiting those sites and the beaches there and the American cemetery we also made it over to Luxembourg there's an American cemetery there that was established after the battle of the bulge if you're familiar with any of those battles and so for me and my boys it was a chance to kind of revisit some of that history and talk about it and then we went to these sites and we had an opportunity to talk some more it was a very moving powerful experience to reflect again on what we

Americans we call America's greatest generation because of what they did and what they accomplished and I remember we have a World War II memorial in Washington D.C.

some of you may have visited the U.S. and visited Washington D.C. before we have a memorial for World War II there and it's one of the more recent memorials that's been built I think it's one of the most beautiful ones that is there in Washington D.C.

I visited there a couple of times and there's a plaque there in the front part of it that's dedicated to women and it's always caught my attention both times that I've visited there and on the plaque the inscription reads something like this is dedicated to women who during the war were not just women but were citizens of the nation and it says World War II was a people's war and everyone was involved in it and that's always caught my attention because when I was about 12 years old we were given an assignment in our class to interview someone who had lived through World War II now unfortunately most of that generation has passed on by now but

I'm thankful that at the time we had to do this assignment I sat down with a lady in our church who was a teenager at the time during World War II and interviewed her about what it was like now again she wasn't serving in the war in the way that we might think about it landing on the beaches of D-Day or these kinds of things but she began to describe to me all of the sacrifices that they made during World War II to support the troops because the boys were over there serving in the war facing hardships trying to do what the nation needed everyone who was at home in the U.S.

[35 : 54] was making all of these sacrifices and she told all of these experiences that she had navigating through those things and it had a big impact on me in terms of helping me to understand how at certain periods in our history we see events like this where there's this shared burden for accomplishing some task World War II was a global event where yeah everyone was involved in it and everyone had some part to play and then that's the picture that that we get here when we read about Paul and his missionary ambitions and as he communicates that to the church it is a shared task when he writes to the church and he says I need your help and he says strive together with me and yes though though though though we recognize that that there may be only a few who have this sort of unique calling to orient their lives around going to the places where people have not yet heard and never had the opportunity to hear they go and they live in that way it's a shared task and the church is in this together so for some of us our calling to support and to pray and to give to encourage to come alongside

Paul's words strive together with them when we look at Paul and throughout his letters and of course when we read the book of Acts and we see all that he did and certainly he explains this throughout his letters he did what he did and he had this aim to preach the gospel where Christ was not known because he was gripped by the reality that Jesus Christ is the faithful covenant keeping Messiah he is the anointed son of God salvation is only found in him right he's gripped by that that reality that what the world needs

Paul's time what the world needed was Christ that's what it says all throughout scripture all throughout the new testament that theme is echoed salvation is found only in him that's it period

one way to know Christ to know Christ and have a relationship with him see and savor all that God is for us in Christ Jesus fast forward 2000 years to our time we live in a we live in a day and age where we see all of this it seems like in recent years there's even more chaos there's even more turmoil in the world that we live in natural disasters wars and pandemics and ethnic tensions in parts of the world all of these things going on and we look out on the world and we say what in the world is going on yet our answer is the same as it was in

Paul's day what does the world need the world needs Jesus the world needs Jesus salvation is found in Christ alone which is why we have this shared task to take the gospel where Christ has not yet been named so that all may have the opportunity to hear the gospel and to know our Lord and Savior let's pray father we thank you for the gospel message which has helped each one of us to know Christ to know that that he is the he is the promised one he is the faithful covenant keeper he is the one who brings us into the family of

God and by him we are made righteous and we have a relationship with you and can know you in him we have peace we have joy we have fulfillment God we thank you for for sending your son to die for us and save us from our sins and yet even as we even as we voice that even as we think on those truths with gratefulness in our hearts we recognize that there are many in our community and in our world who are separated from you by their sin many who have yet to even hear for the first time about who Christ is and so God we pray that you would give us a burden give us a burden to strive together in the work of missions to ensure that every person you have created has the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel all these things we pray in

[42 : 21] Jesus precious name amen GodBay