

# Romans 15:14-33 - Our part in Christ's mission

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our reading for today is taken from Romans chapter 15 verses 14 to 33 and it's on page 1142 of the church bibles which should hopefully be maybe somewhere near you.

These are full of goodness, filled with the 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 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 have said and done, by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God.

So, from Jerusalem all the way round 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.

[ 1 : 40 ] 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 have 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, and after I have enjoyed your company for a while.

Now, however, I am 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.

[ 2 : 44 ] So, after I have completed this task, and I 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 favourably 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.

May the God of peace be with you all. Amen. Great, thank you, Vanessa. Let's pray as we come to God's word. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your word to us, and we pray this morning that you might help us to listen carefully to what you say to us.

Father, we want this to be not just an exercise of me downloading information from my brain into others, but we want this to be us as your people, listening to you and your word speak by your Spirit to us.

[ 4 : 03 ] So we pray that you'll be at work this morning. Save us from distractions or hard-heartedness, that we might listen and submit to your word, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, this is the penultimate sermon in the Book of Romans for us. So we have been working our way through the Book of Romans since September last year, and we are very close to the end, and we'll finish it off next Sunday morning.

Let me start with a little story for you, though. R.J. Balson & Sons is a butcher shop in Dorset. It's a fairly ordinary shop, but its claim to fame is what?

What do you think its claim to fame might be? Let me tell you. It opened in 1515, making it the oldest family business in the country.

So they supplied sausages to Henry VIII's fleet of ships, and they reckon that the Mary Rose sank in the Solent because they were carrying too many sausages. Whether that's true or not, I don't know.

[ 5 : 13 ] But this guy on the picture is Richard Balson. He is the 25th generation of Balsons to run the shop, and he has been doing so for over 50 years. Now, the simple point is this that I want to make from that little story, is that to be born a Balson is to be born a butcher, right?

If you are in the Balson family, you are also in the Balson butcher shop. Those things go together. It's part of the family. Part of the family, you're part of the business, generation after generation. And what I want to show you at the end of the book of Romans is that Paul has a very similar attitude to the life of the church. He says that coming to know Christ, coming to be part of his family, sharing in salvation, means also belonging to the family business.

Not a butcher's business, providing sausages to Tudor ships, but instead the family business of taking the gospel to the nations, telling others the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we don't have lots of time this morning. I want to make sure that we have plenty of time for the baptisms at the end of the service, but I want to show you three things from the passage about this family business. I want to show you firstly how Paul and then the Roman church relate to it, and then come to how we relate to it at the end.

[ 6 : 30 ] So let's start with Paul the pioneer. Paul the pioneer. Here the point is to see that Paul has a unique pioneering role in the family business. If you look down at the second half of verse 16, you'll notice it.

Let me read it to you. 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.

Paul here is a pioneer commissioned with the gospel to take it to the Gentiles. Paul becomes the apostle who takes the message of a Jewish savior to non-Jewish people, to the nations, reaching beyond Jerusalem to those you've never heard.

And this role is both serious for Paul, it's important to him, and also it's something that he is doing through the Lord's strength. Look down at 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, 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 God. 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.

[ 7 : 49 ] Notice that Paul is fully focused here. This is the only thing I want to talk about, this mission. I have been all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum, which is in modern-day Albania. But he's not boasting.

He's not saying, oh, look at all these things I've done. Instead, he knows it's not been done in his own strength. Christ has accomplished it through me, he says. I've done it as God, the owner of the family business, has enabled me to do it by the power of the Spirit and with signs and wonders.

This is Paul's obedience to God on the mission of Christ in the power of the Spirit as Paul pioneers the church to new places to people who've never heard and people who would have assumed that without Paul, the gospel was not for them.

It's worth noticing that this role of Paul the pioneer just comes up over and over again in the New Testament. If you're a Bible reader, you'll have noticed it. We might skip over it as being fairly unimportant, but if you read it, you'll realize that the New Testament, the persistent false teaching of the New Testament, is that you have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian.

And so Paul, who is the Jew of Jews, he was a Pharisee, is chosen by Christ to demonstrate that that is not true, that God's intention was always that the nations would come to him, not through the Jewish nation, but through faith in Jesus Christ.

[ 9 : 06 ] And so as soon as Paul is converted, Jesus sends Ananias to Paul saying, Go, this man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

He is my tool to take the gospel beyond Israel to the nations. In Acts 20, Paul tells the elders of the Ephesian church that I consider my life worth nothing to me.

My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me, the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace. Even in this epistle to the Romans that we've been looking at, he starts with his mission to the Gentiles.

Through him, we've received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. And so that's it here.

And really the very existence of our church this morning, the fact that we are gathered here confident in the name of Jesus, knowing that this Jewish Messiah is not just for Jews, but is for the nations, is because Paul, the pioneer by the Spirit of God on the mission of Jesus Christ, did a good job.

[10:16] Now, before we move on, though, just notice the detail of this with me. Notice his priestly language in verse 16. So look back down at verse 16 and see that Paul pictures himself as essentially an Old Testament Jewish priest.

This is fascinating, right? So he is picturing himself as being the Old Testament Jewish priest, but the offering that he is bringing is the Gentile nations. Now, what is it that would make these Gentile nations an offering that is acceptable and pleasing to God?

Well, you might expect, mightn't you, that Paul would say, well, I bring the nations as a sacrifice in this kind of temple-like language through obedience to the Jewish law. That might be what you would expect.

But he doesn't say that, does he? Look down at verse 16, and you'll notice that it is through his proclamation of the gospel of God and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. In other words, Paul preaches this message about Jesus, and he is like the Old Testament priest, bringing the nations who by the gospel and through the Spirit are made acceptable to God himself.

Holy, sanctified, even Gentile nations who'd never been anywhere near the temple of Jerusalem or anywhere near a circumcision knife. Paul is the pioneer.

[11:29] Secondly, notice Rome, the home, right? Rome, the home. These are wasted on you, but that was an achievement for me thinking Rome, the home, this week, right? Trying to make this interesting and engaging for you as we think about the place of Rome in the mission of Paul.

Rome is to become the home of Paul's missionary journey onwards. So we're not yet at our role in this. We're going to get to that in a moment, but let's grapple first with what Paul is saying the Roman church will be involved with.

Notice how he does this. He explains why he's written the letter to the church. And notice that he's not written his letter because the church is ignorant. That's surprising, I suggest to you, that you might have assumed that Paul writes the letter of Romans to the Roman church because they are ignorant of a few things, and he wants to fill in the blanks.

That is the case in other New Testament letters. The letter of 1 Thessalonians is written because Paul is concerned that the Thessalonian church are not ignorant of what happens when people die. So he writes the letter of 1 Thessalonians to fill them in. But that's not what's going on here. In fact, it's the opposite. Look at 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.

[12:47] Yet I have written to you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again because of the grace God gave me. Here it is then. Paul is not writing the letter to write new things, but rather he's writing boldly to remind them of stuff they already know because of the grace or really the mission that God has given to him as the pioneer of the gospel to the nations.

Now, just think with me. What is the link between these two things? What's the link between Paul's writing and Paul's mission? Notice here, right? Paul writes to remind the church of things they already know.

And it's because they already know them that Paul has not visited them yet. If you look at verse 22, he says, this is why I have been often hindered from coming to you because you're not on my list of places that have never heard the gospel.

So you've not been on my list, so I've not come to you. Instead, I am now writing to you. And why is he writing to them? Because he wants them to be the people who send him onwards to his mission to Spain.

Look at verse 23. But now 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.

[14:02] I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there after I've enjoyed your company for a while. Here it is then. This is why Paul writes Romans,

because he believes that reminding the Roman church of the gospel they already know will fuel them to join in with his mission that he's on to the nations, specifically going to Spain.

Now just think about it. It's his writing of the gospel that inspires them to join in with his mission. In other words, Paul is not just treating Rome like a pit stop on the way to Spain.

You know, the Roman church is not like the motorway services where you just kind of have a brief loo stop, pick up a few sweets and a coffee and then carry on. No, he wants to spend time in Rome. He wants to enjoy their company.

He wants them to invest in his onward journey and assist him. We're going to think about the application of that in a moment. But notice that Paul gives a concrete example of this Roman church responsibility for the gospel in Spain.

How can Paul assume that a church in Rome has a responsibility for people in Spain hearing about Christ? What responsibility do they have? Well, look, he goes to tell you about this Macedonian church that's collecting for the church in Jerusalem.

[15:19] In verses 25 to 27, he's saying, before I get to you in Rome, I've got to go back to Jerusalem with this money that I've been collecting from the Macedonian church, which they've given to the church in Jerusalem. Why would he tell them?

Well, because he wants them to know that actually the church in Macedonia has an obligation to the church in Rome because they're in Christ. And so they should share in their wealth with one another.

They should support one another even when they don't know each other. Spain, Rome and Jerusalem are all connected because they are all part of the family business. And Paul here assumes that the church in Rome will become a home base for him as they pray and refresh him on his way.

So take a look at verse 30. I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus and by the love of the Spirit to join me in my struggle by praying 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 be able to come to you with joy by God's will and in your company be refreshed.

I don't know if you know the story about what happens next, but Paul arrives in Jerusalem and he is pretty quickly arrested. Miraculously, though, he is kept safe, even under arrest.

[16:37] Even arresting him helps to keep him safe. And he travels as a prisoner of the empire to stand trial before Caesar eventually getting to Rome. Paul, the pioneer of the gospel to the nations, Rome, the home of his mission west.

And let's spend the rest of our time thinking about where that leaves us. Kilburn, the custodians. Now that's it here, right? It's taken us a time to get here.

I want to do this carefully because I want you to see that although Romans 15 is not written directly to us, it is written for us. We're not Paul the pioneer. We're not Rome the home.

But still this baton of the family business has now passed down to us in this room. It belongs to us. We, if you like, have the keys of the shop for now. We will hand them on to others.

And although the situation has changed and although the generation of apostolic witness and establishing the church has happened, still our work is not done. And this is our time.

[17:36] And we're to take the gospel message to the people and the nations around us. We are to pick up this great commission to make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Lord Jesus. So let's generalize some of the principles that we found in chapter 15.

And see how they apply to us. Firstly, notice this. Motivation for mission comes from a deeper understanding. My ability to alliterate finished with these headings.

So they're just more mundane. But notice this. This is really important. Paul assumes, doesn't he, that the Roman church having a richer, deeper understanding of the gospel that they already know will motivate them to be involved in mission.

Paul writes in detail to these people things they already know who are competent and mature already. And his assumption is that they hear about Jesus more and more and more. They will be motivated more deeply to be involved in his mission.

Of course, it means, doesn't it, that if you yourself this morning find yourself unmotivated to tell others about Jesus, if you're passive to the plight of the lost in your family or your friendship group or your workplace, the problem might not be that you don't know the gospel at all, but that you're not

pondering it deeply.

[18:53] You're not really listening to the gospel on repeat. Because if you were, you would be motivated. Maybe that's a little bit offensive.

I don't want to offend you this morning. But maybe you think, well, Steve, don't say that to me. I know the gospel. I know the gospel really clearly. I knew the gospel while you were still in nappy, Steve. I don't need church to tell me the gospel. I know that already.

I want the church to tell me new things. I want church to give me kind of practical help with the situations that I face. But let me say that's not how Paul thinks the Christian life works.

Paul thinks the Christian life works, that the church works, and it is established as we are perpetually reminded of things that we know so that we might give ourselves more fully to them. Think about it like going to the gym. Well, I don't go to the gym, so I'm speaking in complete ignorance about the gym. But I think it's pretty fair to say that to benefit from going to the gym, you need to go more than once, right?

[19:52] You know, if you go to the gym once, even if you have the best time that you've ever had in the gym when you go once, you know, you go in, you walk in, you're wearing all the gear.

You really look the part, and everyone's like, oh, they look like they know what they're doing. And you push more weights than you've ever done before. You know, the music was great. You had a great time with your friends in the gym.

But let me say, you do not benefit from going unless you also go the next day, and the day after, and the day after. The benefits of the gym are secured by repetition.

I don't go to the gym. I walk a dog, right? I've got a dog, and I'm up early in the morning walking the dog. And, you know, I get up before Queen's Park is open, the joggers run around the edge of Queen's Park, right? And on the Monday after the London Marathon, there are loads of joggers. They've obviously watched the London Marathon on TV, and they think, oh, I should, I'm going to start running. I'm going to start running. So they're there in their on-cloud trainers and their Lululemon outfit. Is that right? That's what they're wearing, right?

[20:51] Yeah, and their AirPods in. They look the part, right? But then the next week, when it's raining, yeah, it's just me and the guy in his three-quarter shorts, old pair of trainers, and his shell suit jacket that I see every morning.

It's just me and him again. And really, who is it that's actually benefiting from walking around the park or jogging around the park? It's me and him, because we're there every morning. Rain or shine, we're doing it. And it's like that with the Christian life.

If we're going to be part of the family business, if we're going to be motivated for mission, if we're going to grow and flourish in our Christian lives, it's not new information that we need.

It's the old information, deeply understood, richly appropriated, taken in and in and in. That's what the church in Rome needed, not a new revelation, but a deep reminder.

And so Paul writes to them, and he writes to you and me. So we want to play the part, don't we, that God has called us to. We want to play the part in the mission of God through the work of Christ, by the power of the Spirit.

[21:56] And so we need to be perpetually reminded of the gospel. So we do want church to be brilliant, right? We do want you to really enjoy being here. We want you to experience and feel the glory of what God has done. But if you want the gains of church, keep coming.

Week in, week out. You know, the gains of church are really felt when you turn up on a wet Sunday morning when brunch in bed seemed like a better option. Or when you go to community group on a chilly Tuesday evening when you've had a bad day at work and it's the last thing you really want to do.

And it's not because you're earning God's favor, but because spiritual gains come from repetition and remembering. That's the first point. Motivation for mission comes from a deeper understanding. Second implication, notice the priority of the unreached. The priority of the unreached. We've seen carefully, haven't we, how Paul had a specific job, right? Breaking the Christian church out of the Jewish nation, right?

That is not your job. It's not my job. It's been done. We don't have to make it our ambition to preach where Christ was not known like Paul does here. That seems to be uniquely his role for which he's given a special calling, a special empowering of the Spirit.

[ 23 : 05 ] It doesn't suggest that the church in Rome should be doing exactly what he's doing. But even still, even with those caveats in place, what you can see here is that there's a relentless commitment to taking the gospel to people who've never heard.

There is, if you like, inside the gospel itself, an outward force to spread to the places and the people who are yet to hear. So the reminding of the gospel and the deeply understanding of the gospel through reading his letter is to motivate them to go to people who've never heard, sending them to the lost and the least.

Let me just turn this on its head for a moment this morning. Maybe you're here and you're a visitor and you're not a Christian and you think this is all very interesting, but what has it got to do with me? Maybe you think, do you know what, I'm not from a Christian home. I've very rarely, if ever, been in a church building before.

And maybe you think, well, I know what Christians are like. I know the clothes they wear. I know the things they do. I'm not really a Christian type, perhaps you think.

Or maybe the country of origin that you're from is one that is hostile to the gospel. So it's just, it's never occurred to you that being a Christian might be something for you. Well, let me say to you this morning that this message of the gospel is for you.

[ 24 : 27 ] Christ came for you. He came for the lost and the overlooked. In fact, he came especially for those who think it's nothing to do with them.

Because he is the most glorified as he takes people from even the far-flung corners of the world or the darkest corners of our neighborhood. And he rescues them by his grace and his mercy for his glory.

And he calls to you this morning. You who think in your mind, hey, this isn't really for me. I'm not that kind of person. He says, no, I'm exactly the person for you. I'm exactly the savior you need. You need saving from your sin and I alone can do it. Maybe you are a Christian this morning. Then you need to understand, don't you, that the gospel message sends you to the least and the lost and the lonely and the disconnected and the forgotten and the distant.

It sent Paul to Spain. It commissioned the church in Rome to be a launchpad for mission to a country that they'd never been to. And it sends you and I to our neighbors who we don't know so well.

[ 25 : 35 ] It sends us to volunteer in the youth ministry with children who we find it hard maybe to love. It sends us to the no-go estate. It sends us to the homeless and the broken. It sends us to the people on the street who nobody else talks to.

It sends us to the people that we're maybe uniquely equipped to reach. And it says the gospel is being given to you for them and their benefit. It says the gospel is being given to you for them. I've been thinking about it this week. What do you want the fruit in church life to be from like 10 months studying the book of Romans? It's a lot of Sunday sermons, yeah, in the book of Romans. What do you want the fruit to be on that? Well, I really do hope that as a church we are clearer on our definitions of word like sin and grace and justification.

I hope if you've been listening to the series that you know a little bit better about what sanctification means and what it means to grow in holiness. I hope you know a bit more about what life by the Spirit is and what it means to be full of the Spirit of God and to know that all things are working together for our good.

[ 26 : 40 ] I hope you know that. But I think really we will know as a church if we have really engaged with the book of Romans, if we find in our hearts a newer, richer, deeper motivation for mission.

A passion that we never had before for those who have never heard the gospel. We'll be a church that doesn't just invite our mates to church, which is a great thing to do. I hope you do invite them. We'd love to have them.

But we also invite the stranger. We express the concern for the work of the gospel far away from here. Perhaps I could put it this way. I don't think that the test of your theological soundness, if we can put it like that, is not just what you might write down in answers to a set of questions.

No, the test of your theological soundness is your love for the lost. Do you love the lost? And if you don't love the lost, those outside of Christ, your problem is not just a heart problem.

It's a theology problem. You don't yet really understand. You have not yet listened. Because concern for the lost for no other reason other than the fact that they're lost outside of Christ, that is

the fruit of good theology.

[ 27 : 54 ] There you go. The priority of the unreached. Thirdly, partnership always means praying. I've never been to R.J. Balson and Sons Butcher's Shop in Dorset.

I kind of feel like going though now. I don't know about you, but it might be quite interesting. I would imagine that not everybody in the shop does the same job, right? They're not all making sausages. They're not all working on the till. They're not all doing deliveries. When I used to go and help in my uncle's butcher's shop, my job was to take sheep's hearts and put them in bags. I loved that as a kid because they felt kind of funky, right?

And you put them in a bag. Gross, I know, but there you go. That was my job. They all have different roles. And that's it here, isn't it? We've all got different roles in the mission, right? In the family business of taking the gospel to the nations, we are not all the same.

We're not all pioneering like Paul. We're not going to be the church in Rome necessarily, but we are all part of the business. And if you're part of the business, there is one job that we all do.

[ 28 : 55 ] It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what your gifts are. It doesn't matter where you live or where you've been put. This is your job. It's my job. It's all of our jobs. Pray. Pray.

Notice how urgent this is in verse 30. Urgent, says Paul.

Son, spirit, father, pray for me, he says. And he wants them to join in his struggle by praying. It's this idea, isn't it, that he is struggling with opposition and shipwrecks and persecutions.

But also it's this struggle to get the gospel out to the nations. Join with me in that struggle. Partner with me in the mission by praying.

By praying. Praying that Paul would be kept safe. Praying that he'd be favorably received. And so for you and me, if I can give you a really concrete application from the sermon this morning, it'd be to go to the missions board at the back, grab the London City Mission prayer news or the open door prayer news, and just say, I'm going to pray for something in here every day this week.

[ 30 : 14 ] Because that is our job. This is the family business. And this is the role that we all have. The other concrete application would be to come to the central prayer meeting on Wednesday this week and pray.

Join the struggle as we work together with the saints in all of history to take the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ to those who've never heard it before. This is our job.

This is our family business. And praying is the job we all need to do. Let me pray as I close.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we are sat together in this room because faithful men and women down through the years have listened to this call to take the gospel to people who've never heard it.

So we want to thank you for the people who told us. Parents, uncles, aunts, Sunday school teachers, youth workers, strangers, colleagues.

And Lord, we want to pray that you might so help us to understand the gospel that we are sent out to others to join in with this mission.

[ 31 : 32 ] And Lord, we recognize that we all have a slightly different part to play. We all know different people. We all have different gifts. We're all in different places. And yet, Lord, we pray especially that you might make us faithful to this call to pray.

That the good news of the Lord Jesus might spread to others, even as we ask in his name and for his glory. Amen.