

WHAT'S OUR ROLE IN REACHING THE NATIONS?

Romans 15:14-33

Key Truth

Some of us are to go while the rest of us serve as a “base of operations”, providing those we send the support they need.

It is our duty to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every tribe, tongue and nation. There remains several thousand unreached and under-reached people groups. We are responsible to reach them. What is our role in reaching the nations?

This morning we begin a study of the book of Romans. We will discover why the letter of Romans was written and in so doing discover our role in reaching the nations.

The book of Romans is one of the most powerful and influential books ever written. Augustine, one of the most brilliant theologians of the early church, came to faith after reading Romans chapter thirteen. Martin Luther recovered the doctrine of salvation by faith from his study of Romans 1:17 and went on to lead the Protestant Reformation. While listening to the preface of Luther's commentary on Romans, John Wesley felt his heart “strangely warmed” and he was saved. John Wesley and his brother Charles were used mightily by God in both England and the United States to bring revival in the eighteenth century. The great Puritan preacher, John Bunyan, was so inspired by Romans that he wrote the immortal *Pilgrim's Progress*.

When we begin a study of any book of the Bible we need to ask and answer some basic questions in order to understand the historical and theological context of the book. Good Bible commentaries will cover these issues in their introductions.

Though we refer to Romans as “the book of Romans” it actually is a letter. What is the first thing you do when you receive a letter (or an email)? You look to see who it is from.

So who wrote the letter of Romans?

WHO WROTE THE LETTER OF ROMANS?

The first word of Romans identifies the author as Paul; *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus...* (Rom. 1:1). This is amazing if you know Paul's story.

Listen to Paul's description of himself prior to his conversion:

Philippians 3:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Paul was a contemporary of Jesus. He considered Jesus a blasphemer. Paul was committed to stamping out the Jesus movement that emerged from Peter's Pentecost sermon. En route to persecute Christians in Damascus, Paul encountered Jesus and was converted (Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-21). Jesus commissioned Paul to reach the Gentiles. Paul's worldview and theology was so rocked, it took him several years of study and reflection to put it all together (Gal. 1:11-17). Paul was radically transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He never got over God's grace. He wrote Timothy:

¹ Timothy 1:12-17 (ESV)

¹² I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for

eternal life.¹⁷ To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

A major portion of this letter is dedicated to explaining the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. For Paul, the Gospel was not theory, it was the truth and power of God by which the whole definition and trajectory of his life was changed. His passion was to share the life changing message of the Gospel with everyone beginning with the target audience of his letter.

Who were these Romans to whom Paul wrote?

TO WHOM DID PAUL WRITE THE LETTER OF ROMANS?

The question answers itself: Paul wrote to believers who lived in the city of Rome. But what we may not know is that Paul had not yet been to Rome; he did not plant this church nor did he know the majority of the people to whom he wrote!

How, then, did the church in Rome come to be? Acts 2:10 records that devout Jews living in Rome came to Jerusalem in 33AD to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. They heard Peter's Pentecost sermon and placed their faith in Jesus as their Messiah and Savior. Returning to Rome, they shared the Gospel with others and the church was born. By the time Paul wrote his letter, the Roman church was almost 25 years old and it was a mix of Jews and Gentiles.

So when did Paul write to the Romans?

WHEN DID PAUL WRITE THE LETTER OF ROMANS?

Paul probably wrote this letter near the end of his third missionary journey in 57AD. The following outline helps us place Romans in flow of Paul's ministry career.

Paul's First Missionary Journey, Acts 13–14 (48–49 AD)

Paul and Barnabas were sent out from the church in Antioch. They planted churches in the region of Galatia (modern Turkey).

Jerusalem Council, Acts 15:1–35 (49–50 AD)

The leaders of the Jerusalem church confirmed that God was working through Paul to reach the Gentiles.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey, Acts 15:36–18:22 (50–52 AD)

On this trip, Paul spent one and one-half years in Corinth (Acts 18:11). This period in Corinth saturates Paul with the defiled practices of pagan culture.

Paul's Third Missionary Journey, Acts 18:23–21:16 (53–57 AD)

Paul left Antioch and traveled through lower Galatia to Ephesus, where he stayed approximately three years. He traveled to other cities also eventually staying in Corinth for three months before traveling to Jerusalem. It was during his three months in Corinth that Paul probably wrote Romans in early 57 AD.

This brings us to the crucial question: *why did Paul write this letter to the Romans?*

WHY DID PAUL WRITE THIS LETTER TO THE ROMANS?

To answer this question, turn to Romans 15:14-33.

Romans 15:14–33 (ESV)

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ 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;²⁰ 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,²¹ but as it is written,

"Those who have never been told of him will see,
and those who have never heard will understand."

²² This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. ²³ 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, ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. ²⁹ I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

³⁰ 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, ³¹ that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³² so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. ³³ May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

By the end of his third missionary journey, Paul had succeeded in taking the gospel throughout the northern regions of the Mediterranean world. By 57AD Paul was setting his sights on the west including Rome and from Rome westward to Spain.

Just as the church in Antioch served as his "base of operations" for his three missionary journeys, so also, Paul hoped the church in Rome would serve as his "base of operations" as he took the Gospel to Spain. To this end Paul wrote this letter to introduce himself, to express his desires and to clearly explain his Gospel. His hope was that the Roman church would not only welcome him but partner with him in advancing the Gospel to the west.

Paul was not a "Lone Ranger". He was not so arrogant as to think he could fulfill his ministry without the aid of fellow believers. He obviously valued the church and desired to connect with the church family. He respected their spiritual giftedness; he anticipated they would minister to him. He respected their knowledge of the Word and their spiritual maturity. His desire was to "plug into" the ministry with them and then, after a time, be sent by them to preach the Gospel in Spain.

This is God's strategy for reaching the nations: some of us, like Paul, are to go, the rest of us, like the church of Rome, are to serve as a "base of operations" providing the support needed by those we send.

Our support certainly is to include finances, but it is so much more. Our support starts when a person or couple begins to explore serving in missions. We begin to pray. We counsel together and give guidance. We need to help them discover their spiritual gifts. We need to train them to rightly interpret and teach God's Word. We explore various ministries to determine a good fit. We make sure they have the financial support they need. We stay in close communication when they are on the field. We make sure they are known to the church family. We pray for them continuously. We make sure they rest when they come home on furlough. We intervene when necessary to protect them.

Other churches and missionaries have different ways of doing missions that God is using to spread the Gospel. But we're excited about this model. We were Nate & Megan's "base of operations" as they brought the Gospel to the Cuyunon people in the Philippines. We are Dave & Cindy Gettis' "base of operations" as they teach and train pastors and missionaries reaching Central and South America. We are excited to see who's next.

You are part of this "base of operations" as you give financially to Grace, as you pray for our sent ones and as you encourage those whom we will send in the future.

QUESTIONS:

- ▶ In what additional ways could the church fulfill its role as the “base of operations” for our missionaries?

- ▶ In what ways should our missionaries support the church?