

Romans 15:17 Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.

**18 For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient--
19 in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.**

20 And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,²¹ but as it is written: *"To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand."*

**²² For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.²³ But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you,
(NKJV)**

Do you remember our context this morning?

Paul is talking about his ministry to the Romans. He has explained how he has functioned as a priest and a preacher in verses 16-19. We will finish where we left off regarding Paul the preacher. Then we will continue where he goes on to explain his ministry as **a pioneer**.

We left off on verse 19 of our text.

19 in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

Paul is making mention of his Divine affirmation. If I understand the sentence correctly he is essentially speaking of only those things that **God accomplished through him**, in word and deed...in mighty signs and wonders...by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul serves as an example of how we should deal with those wonderful things that God chooses to do through us. He is not afraid to talk about them. But he is quick to mention the source. He does not emphasize what **he** did to cause it to happen.

His focus is on what **God** did to accomplish the work that needed done.

Let's refresh ourselves on what Paul's work was like.

Acts 13:1 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.² As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."³ Then, having

fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away. ⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant. ⁶ Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, ⁷ who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹ Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?" ¹¹ And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

(NKJV)

Here we see right off the bat that Paul and Barnabas were singled out by God. They didn't elect themselves as church planters. God picked them. They weren't sent out by their will. They were sent out by the Holy Spirit. And at one of their first stops Paul pronounced a person blind. Now **this** isn't a ministry you see very often. It was a sign.

Acts 19:1 And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples **2** he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." **3** And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." **4** Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." **5** When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **6** And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. (NKJV)

Here again we see amazing signs.

We see the gift of tongues and prophesy. These signs were used to verify the Holy Spirit's work among diverse groups of people. It was God's endorsement that showed that he was including these people into the body of Christ.

Acts 19:11 Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. (NKJV)

Here we see some of the **more unusual** signs. We need to keep in mind the Ephesus was a center for sorcery and witchcraft. These people were impressed by spiritual power. Here God used the sweaty old rags that Paul would use to wipe his face and God would heal people with them. This was clearly a display of power. And evidently not one that Paul had anything to do with. It is hard to imagine what some tv preachers today would do if God actually did something like this through them. They would soon have a sweaty rag healing mailing program. But Paul regarded it as he should have. This was just one more way God displayed his power in order to call people to Himself.

Back to our text:

19 in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

See how Paul gives God credit. He says, by the power of the Spirit of God. He makes it very clear that there was nothing about **him** that made these things happen. It is all about God and God's power.

Then he paints for us a map in just a few words. From Jerusalem round about to Illyricum (ill-leer'-ik-um) paints a big circle on a map of Paul's ministry area. This is the area now known as Yugoslavia and Albania. This covers a 1400 mile diameter. Paul covered a lot of territory. He was a work horse of a man.

Then he says

I have fully preached the gospel

What does that mean? What does it mean for an evangelist to fully preach the gospel? As far as we can tell, what Paul did was establish churches in each town. Think about the implications. Paul didn't ever see himself as the only one who could preach the gospel or share the good news. He believed that other believers were qualified and called to spread the gospel. They were called, just as we are, to go into the world (which we are already going into anyway) and share the gospel and make disciples. When a church is planted, the assumption is that the church will be about the business of the kingdom. The assumption is that we will be fulfilling the great commission. We are not to sit back and wait for a preacher or an evangelist to share the gospel with our co-workers, with the store clerks, with the waiters or waitresses, or with whoever it might be that we have contact with. The assumption is that if there is a church, there is a **gospel distribution center** set up. And when that happens, Paul feels that he can move on to the next location. Paul was not full of his own importance. He understood what the Holy Spirit will

do in a true church. If there is a church firmly established in town, as far as an apostle is concerned, the gospel has been fully preached.

OK Let's move on.

Paul the pioneer.

I'd like to take a second here to note something. Paul, as far as we know, never went outside the Greek speaking world. God arranged to send Christ into a world where a single government covered a large portion of the civilized world. And they shared a common language. So when Paul began to spread the gospel, he was able to do it to people who shared a language, and to a large part, shared a culture. So Paul's ministry remained in an area where he was ready, just as he was, to do ministry.

Bob Finley began a ministry called Christian Aid Mission probably 50 years ago after returning from a cross-cultural mission. He had gone to China as a missionary. He had to learn the language. He had to learn their culture. All of this took a great deal of time and money. Normally it takes about 3 years to begin to get up to speed on communicating to the inhabitants of another culture. In other words, it takes 3 years to reach the level that every indigenous 12 year old starts at. His experience gave him a very bad taste for cross cultural missions. Not only did it take a long time, but he found that the gospel he presented was viewed as an **American** influence. Because Mr Finley was from America and looked like an American and lived like an American, the gospel appeared foreign.

Mr Finley came to the conclusion, as a result of his experiences and his study, that God did not intend Christians to do cross cultural missions. He points to the fact that New Testament missions was always done to fellow Greek speakers. This led him to a two fold strategy of 1) Reaching people from other cultures when they enter our culture. He began a mission to reach international students. These people are on our soil, often needing help learning our language. And we can reach them, just as we are, without conveying the idea that we are bringing into their culture a foreign influence. Then when these students go home they go home with a mission of spreading the gospel to their villages. There is no connection to an outside source of authority. Their Christianity is fleshed out in their culture. 2) The second part of the strategy is for developed nations to share their abundant resources with indigenous ministries so more can be accomplished than could be accomplished with their meager resources. Instead of sending Americans that cost \$60K to \$90K per year, for three years accomplishing nothing, they can send an army of indigenous missionaries for the same price, ready to hit the pavement running.

Now Mr Finley takes his stance to the extreme of forming absolutes. He believes it is **wrong** to send missionaries cross culturally. We began supporting itinerant missions many years ago because we simply do not have many resources. So we

determined that we wanted to get the best bang for the buck, the most ministry for the dollar. Since then we have developed a good relationship with Steven VanValkenburg. Steve shares our general theological base. He understands what kind of ministries we want to support. And he can oversee the missions to make sure they remain accountable. He removes the biggest weakness of supporting indigenous ministries. And that weakness is the difficulty of ensuring that **the mission is doing what they say** and that they are **remaining true to God's word**.

Now, on the other side of this debate we have David Sitton with To Every Tribe Mission. His experience was completely different than Mr. Finley's. Mr Sitton came to Christ as a young man. He was essentially a surfer and a rebel. When he came to Christ he felt called to taking the gospel to those who had never heard it. So that is exactly what he did. He took his life in his hands and went places that few white people had ever been. He went into the mountains of New Guinea. He learned the culture and language of the tribes people. And he shared the Gospel with them. He encountered a great deal of spiritual resistance, but he remained faithful to his calling. And now there are bodies of Christ in a lot of areas in New Guinea that didn't have a church until David went there.

Mr. Sitton is convinced that God sends people to people cross culturally, because spreading the glory of Christ is that important. At one point God saw fit to remove Mr Sitton for New Guinea and train others to do the ministry. He is committed to spreading a gospel from America that does not carry American cultural assumptions with it. Theirs is one of the purest mission outreaches that focusses primarily on excellent theology along with strict accountability. But you can already guess what the weakness of this strategy of ministry is. Time and money. It takes a lot of time and money to accomplish anything.

Our church supports Alex Sisson as a missionary to New Guinea. We are only a tiny piece of their support, but we believe that he and his family are spreading the glory of God in that area. So we support them.

Now, which is right? Does God **condemn** cross cultural missions as Mr Finley would say? Or does God **command** cross cultural missions as Mr Sitton would say?

Well, there is a lot of truth in the positions of both people. And both seek to most glorify God given the information they have at hand. All we know for sure is that many people have heard and responded to the gospel of Christ in areas where the gospel had not been heard. And it is a result of the ministries of both of these men. Our stance up to this point is this. We as believers are called to minister the Gospel of Christ and to support the ministry of the Gospel to those who need to hear it, and especially to those who have never heard it.

In the world we live in:

We are to go into that world with the gospel, seeking to make disciples, calling them to come to Christ and teaching them to obey God's word as we obey it.

Outside of the world we live in:

Where there are indigenous missions doing the job of spreading the Gospel with a channel of accountability, we prefer to support **them**.

Where there are no indigenous missions or we have no way of confirming any accountability, we will support cross cultural missionaries that are accountable.

So now, on to our text:

Romans 15 20-23 And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,

Here we get a glimpse of Paul's intent, of his heart.

He says I have **made it my aim**.

It means to be ambitious. It means to strive earnestly, to make something our goal, our target, what we will shoot for.

What we learn here is that Paul made a decision at some point. We don't see that this is something that God commanded. Paul took the information at his disposal and he concluded something. It probably went something like this.

I was an enemy of the gospel. Yet Christ saved me. And He drew me to Himself.

I was able to spend lots of time studying God's word in Antioch. And then God called me to His ministry through my friends at Antioch. Now **what is most**

needed? Does the kingdom most need good teachers to go around the circuit of existing churches? Without a doubt there would be a need for that. But that is not the **greatest** need. The **greatest need** is for the gospel to be proclaimed where it has never been proclaimed. And that will also be the hardest ministry.

Paul probably chewed on that a little bit and said- that is for me. It is much like the mission that David Sitton chose for himself. He wanted to go to the tribes that had not heard the gospel. His life would have been much easier if he had chosen what most Americans choose. He could have easily been just one more speaker. And that is legitimate work. But it was not what he was called to.

The point I am trying to make is that all of us have the opportunity to choose what to aim our lives at. We can choose to be comfortable if we like. We can choose to be wealthy. We can choose to be spiritual. We can choose to be lots of things.

But the question really comes down to this. **Will we choose to be about the things that God most cares about?** Will we choose to fight off our desire for comfort? Will we address our fears? Will we put aside our reservations? And

will we say- **I want my life to count for eternity**. I don't care how hard it is. I

don't care how awkward it is. I will make it **my aim in life**, I will make it my

lifetime target to be the person that God will use to build His kingdom in the area of responsibility He has given me. That can be done as a housewife. That can be

done as a husband and father. That can be done as a worker at a job site. It can be done as a student or teacher at a school. But it will not just happen to you. It didn't just happen to Paul. Paul had to make up his mind. He had to decide. He had to choose how he would spend his life. You see, you have the opportunity to make something your aim. You are given the power to determine what you will shoot your life at. And you can rest assured that you will be used to do very little more than you are determined to do. Are you a wife and mother? Truly see it as a mission. Are you a husband and father. Truly see it as a mission. Don't be satisfied at just getting your kids through childhood. Use your days to train your children in godliness. And I am not talking about preaching something to them that they see you violate every day. I am talking about taking on the demons in your life and teaching your kids and those in your family how to take them on in theirs. That thing that you struggle the most with..... that is the thing you must overcome in order to raise your children to follow Christ. Never think for a moment that spoken words will overcome the example of failure that you display daily. Humans know hypocrisy instinctively. And they despise it. Make it your aim to live godly lives.

Husbands, make it your aim to love your wife as Christ loved the church. Each day determine to wake up and ask yourself, how can I better love my wife today? How can I contribute to her spiritual and physical well being?

Wives, make it your aim to be a help to your husband. Each day determine to wake up and ask yourself, with the mission my husband has and the pressures he is facing, how can I best help him fulfill his mission?

And kids, you have a job too. It is yours to wake up every day and ask, how can I best obey my parents? You might have to stop blaming your parents for your own tendencies to rebel. That will be tough. But you must ask how can I overcome that in me that wants to rebel against everything I am commanded? How can I cheerfully do what I am told? And even more, how can I help my household run better? And why? For the glory of God. That is all.

I guaranty you that a household that is running like that will draw the attention of the world. They have never seen such a thing.

But it will not happen. I guaranty it will not happen, if you do not intentionally and continually make it your aim.

Students, how about you? Will you make it your aim to be obedient to Christ in your surroundings? Will you make it your aim to **say no** to the temptations to do wrong things to fit in with those you would like to impress? Will you make it your **aim to share the gospel in every opportunity that you notice**? Will you make it your aim to pray for your classmates and your school? Don't sit around waiting for something to happen to you. You have the power to direct your attention. You have the power to set goals and focus your life. Make it your aim.

So Paul made it his aim to preach the gospel. And our text says **not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,** You see, there is nothing wrong with preaching in existing churches. Some people are given gifts that build up existing churches. There is nothing wrong with that. Paul said this in Corinthians

1 Corinthians 3:5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (NKJV)

So you can see here that Paul is not belittling other people's ministries. It is great that God gives the church people like Apollos. It is great that there are people who can come to us and preach on any number of things. That is all good. And it is all of God. Paul isn't making less of that. But that simply was not what **he** had made his aim. That isn't what **he** was convinced that God wanted **him** to do.

Paul wanted to go where no gospel man had gone before. He wanted to preach to people who had never heard of Christ. David Sitton could describe this desire better than I ever could. Paul didn't want to do anything that would take credit for what someone else had done. How many ministries are like that? So many would be happy to have one more statistic that they could brag about to the donor base. Notice here that Paul never mentions numbers. He never tells us how many churches he started. He never tells us how many people he baptized. He never tells us how many members there are at any of his churches. Now you would think if he was trying to show his credibility to the Roman church he would do this. But he doesn't. It is enough for him to lay out his heart.

Our world needs more ministers like Paul. He preaches the true gospel relentlessly and tirelessly. He doesn't even make enough money, by doing so, to support himself, nonetheless get filthy rich. You can't get a statistic out of him other than how wide his ministry range is. And he lays out his credentials only to gain the credibility for his message to be received as it should be.

Then our text continues

,²¹ **but as it is written: "To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand."**

This is a quoted from **Isaiah 52:15** **So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see, And what they had not heard they shall consider. (NKJV)**

The passage is clearly speaking of Christ. It is a prophesy that says that the gentiles will be preached to. It appears to be couched in the final judgment, but just as likely applies to the time leading up to that judgment. Isaiah could see that the Gentiles would be preached to. It would be interesting to talk to Paul and hear his story about this verse. I wonder if he had been reading Isaiah and this took on new meaning to him, to the place that it became an aim of his life.

Well, we have completed Pauls description of his ministry as priest, preacher and pioneer.

The easiest application this morning comes in the question, what will we aim our lives at? What are you aiming your life at this morning? Is life just happening to you, or are you using your time as a tool to accomplish something for the kingdom? I think this sermon will have accomplished a great deal if we would answer, before God, two questions this week.

What **have** I made my aim in this life?

What **should** I make my aim in this life?