Honouring the God of All Nations

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[0:00] Romans chapter 15 and we're going to pick up from verse 8 and read till the end of the chapter. So Romans chapter 15 verse 8. And again, And again, And again, Isaiah says, The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles.

In him will the Gentiles hope. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.
I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.
But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.
In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum, I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ, and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but, as it is written, those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.
[2:44] This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem, bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.
For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be a service to them in material blessings.
When, therefore, I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.
I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will, I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.
[4:23] May the God of peace be with you all. Amen. This is God's word. Good morning, everyone.

My name is Martin, and I'll be speaking from that passage that Beck read for us from Romans chapter 15, so it would be great if you could have that open to follow along.
How about we ask for God's help as we come to consider his word. Lord, as we meditate on your word this morning, we thank you that you speak to us through it, and we ask that you would quieten each of our hearts, that we might hear and receive and meditate on what you have for us this morning.
By your grace, enable me to speak clearly, and may your message land on ears and hearts that hear and receive. In Jesus' name.
Amen. Well, the God who calls us is the God of all nations. He's not a small God. He's not a tribal God.
[6:00] He's not a God of narrow vision or of petty concerns. He's not confined by our borders. He's not bound to one culture.

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God cannot be compelled to favour one people over another people because he is the God of all. He's the God of all nations. In the first part of the passage that was read for us, in Romans chapter 15, verses 8 to 12, we have four quotations from the Old Testament.
And the common theme of these quotations is the Greek word ethne, translated in ESV as Gentiles. Gentiles. But really that word just means the nations. The nations. Most English translations have the word Gentiles. And when we read that, I think if you're familiar with that word, what it brings to mind is the distinction between Jews and Gentiles.
The Gentiles are the other nations, the non-Jewish nations. But you can just translate that word as the nations. And really, I think that would be a better translation here.
[7:13] In fact, in most places in the Bible. And probably even more than nations though, ethne is not just nations. They're people groups. Ethno-cultural groups.

They're not geopolitical entities, the nations, this word, but different groups of people. So let me just read those verses again.
And I want to substitute. I'm just going to say nations because that's a bit less clunky than people groups. But I'll substitute that word. And think people groups as you hear these verses again from verse 8.
For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised, that's the Jews, to show God's truthfulness in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs and in order that the nations might glorify God for his mercy, as it is written.
Therefore, I will praise you among the nations and sing to your name. And again it said, rejoice, O nations, with his people. And again, praise the Lord, all you nations, and let all the peoples extol him.
[8:23] And again Isaiah says, the root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the nations, in him will the nations hope. So this is God's plan for the nations of our world.

All the people groups, every group, every ethno-cultural group, from the Angolo people of Sudan to the Wiradjuri people of central New South Wales, every people group.
Now one reason I think nations or people groups is a better translation here than Gentiles is that it enables us to see that God's plan has not yet reached its conclusion. For example, if we read verse 10, rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people, we might say, well, that's already happening.
We're the Gentiles. Most of us, maybe there are a few Jews amongst us, I don't know, but we're from among the nations, we're Gentiles. We rejoice in Christ. You know, there's a single boundary that the gospel must cross from Judah, Gentile, and it's already crossed it.
Here we are. But if we translate it instead, rejoice, O people groups, rejoice, O nations, we recognise that there's not just one boundary that needs to be crossed, there are many boundaries that need to be crossed.
[9:51] It's not enough that some people, some people groups rejoice in Christ. The plan of God is not complete until people from all people groups rejoice in Christ.

So what is God's plan for the nations? Verse 8, that we glorify God for his mercy. Verse 10, that we rejoice with his people.
Verse 11, that we praise the Lord and extol him. Verse 12, that we hope in the root of Jesse, that is in Jesus Christ. That God, the God of hope, verse 13, fills us with all joy and peace in believing.
Do you see in these verses, there's no disjunction between God's glory and our joy. They belong together. You remember the first question, if you're familiar with it, of the Westminster Shorter Catechism?
What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.
[11:06] There's no disjunction between God's glory and our joy. Is our world at present full of sorrow and conflict and despair?

Do you want all the peoples of the world instead to rejoice and have peace and abound in hope? Well, let all the peoples of the world turn to Christ and believe in him and glorify God for his mercy.
Joy to the world. The Lord is come. Let earth receive her king. The God who calls to all nations. The God who will be praised by all nations. He is the Lord of all. He's the Lord of the nitty gritty of your life. Every detail. He made every blade of grass.
There's nothing that's so small that's beneath his attention. He is your heavenly father who cares for you in the small things of life. But he also wants to draw you out to care about the big things.

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[12:15] And today as we look at Romans 15, there are three questions I think for us to consider that will help us align our desires and our lives with the plan of God for all nations.

Firstly, let me give you some context. By the time we get to Romans chapter 15 verse 14, we're really in the tail end of the book. At one level we've passed from profound theology and the sublime ethics that we have in the earlier chapters to various housekeeping matters between Paul and the Romans.
He's telling them about his travel itinerary. He, in chapter 16, addresses various groups of believers in Rome. The central part of Romans, chapters 1 to 15, or 15 verse 13, you can read them and it almost doesn't matter the historical context.
Like you can read them as if they're just written directly to us. They're truth with a capital T. But from Romans 15 verse 14 on, it's all historical context.
It's about Paul and the Romans and his relationship with them and, you know, what he wants them to know about him and how they can help each other.
[13:31] And so having written this long and weighty letter, Paul seeks to explain why he felt it was appropriate that he even write to the Romans as he did.

Look at Romans chapter 15 verse 14. He says, 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.
He's saying, don't misinterpret this letter as a rebuke. Now, the thing is, Paul didn't found the church in Rome. In fact, he hadn't yet been to Rome to visit the Christians there.
He's writing around A.D. 57 from Corinth. And so how would they receive this letter from someone who hadn't even come to see them?
Well, Paul says, don't take it as a rebuke. I'm not writing because I doubt the genuineness of your faith and your godliness. So why did he write to them?
[14:37] Well, he wrote to them because, as he goes on to say in verses 15 and 16, Christ had appointed Paul to be the apostle to the nations. Verse 15, God had appointed Paul as a minister of Christ Jesus to the nations.

And the purpose there in verse 16 is that the offering of the nations would be acceptable to God. Now, that phrase there doesn't mean, when it speaks of the offering of the nations, it doesn't mean something that the nations offer to God.
It means the nations themselves are the offering. The people are the offering. They're being presented to God to be pleasing and acceptable to him.
He wants people from every nation, every people group to be saved by the name of Jesus. And this particular grace was given to Paul by God.
And so as a servant of Christ Jesus to the nations, Paul felt this connection with the believers in Rome. He even felt some sense of responsibility for them.
[16:04] And so he wrote them this letter. But more than that, he wants to visit them in person. He says in verse 23 that he's often, he's longed for many years to come to them.

And now he says, at last I'm coming. He says, at last, after many years of wanting to come to you, at last I'm coming to you.
But first, verse 25, he says, I'm going to Jerusalem. I've something else to do first. So I'll come to you, but first I'm going to Jerusalem.
And actually, when I come to you, I'm heading somewhere else beyond you. Verse 24, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain.
So now Paul is looking forward to visiting Rome. He expects that to be worthwhile in its own right. He thinks, he recognises that he'll enjoy their company for a while.
[17:02] But ultimately, it's a step in a journey further west. So Paul's telling the Romans his travel plans. He's in Corinth currently. He's heading to Jerusalem. He's going to come to them in Rome next.

And then he wants to send them. He wants them to send him on to Spain. And he asks for their help with each leg of the journey. Now, that's all well and good for the Romans, you know, to know Paul's travel itinerary.
But what does it have to do with us? Does Romans 15 have any relevance for us? Well, I think the relevance for us is that Paul's travel plans display, they show the apostles' heart.
They're plans to honour the God of all nations. Yes, Paul had a unique role in salvation history, but he says more than once in his letters, imitate me.

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And even here in Romans 15, Paul sought to involve the Romans in each stage of the next chapter of his ministry and mission, asking them to pray for him and support him in what he was doing.
[18:14] So this passage, I want to suggest, has three questions for us to consider, prompted by the call of the God of all nations and by the missionary heart of the Apostle Paul.

The first question is this, how might we help advance the frontier of world mission? How might we help advance the frontier of world mission?
Christ had given Paul a job to do to take the good news to the nations. Look at verse 17. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.
For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the nations to obedience by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.
Paul says, this is what he's been doing. He's been proclaiming Christ to the nations and his mission work has been effective. He's at pains to clarify that he's not boasting of anything he himself has done, but of what Christ has accomplished through him by word and deed.
[19:44] Word and deed encompasses all of Paul's activity, includes his preaching and what he describes there as his miraculous signs and wonders, not done in his own power, but in the power of the Spirit.

But Paul's mission work was effective, Paul says, because Christ was working through him. When God gives you work to do, when you do that work in the power of God's Spirit, when Christ works through you, it will be effective.
You can have confidence in that. It's entirely appropriate to point to the fruit of what Christ does and say, look at what Christ has done.
Well, how much had Christ done through Paul? Exactly what had Christ done? Paul says in verse 19, from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum, I fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.
Illyricum is just northwest of Macedonia, so it's basically just across the, which sea is it? The Adriatic that's east of Italy? Just across the sea from Italy. It's as far west as you can go, heading from Jerusalem before you get to Italy.
[21:02] And he says, I fulfilled the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum. What does that mean? Well, it doesn't mean that every single person has become a Christian. Clearly not.

Paul had been persecuted by non-believers wherever he went. Does it mean that every single person has at least heard the gospel?
No, it doesn't mean that either. What Paul means is that in every region, the pioneering work had been done.
In every province, in every major city, Paul had preached the gospel, planted churches, appointed leaders. The gospel had gained a foothold in every territory.
There was still much work to be done, but it was a different kind of work, consolidating, strengthening, intensifying the work in the cities, extending the work out into the rural areas.
[22:07] work that others could do, but the pioneering work was complete. That's what Paul emphasizes in the next few verses.

And these are the verses I really want you to know. Look at verses 20 to 24. Verse 20 to 24, he says, Thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.
This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I've enjoyed your company for a while.
See, Paul's ambition is to preach the gospel where Christ hasn't been named. God's intention in the quote from Isaiah there in verse 21 is that those who haven't heard about Jesus will hear.
Verse 22, the reason Paul explains why he hadn't come to Rome, why he'd been hindered, is because the gospel had already reached Rome. And Paul wanted to take it where Christ was not yet named.
[23:36] There were more urgent needs elsewhere. And even now that he comes to Rome, Paul anticipates and hopes that after spending some time with them, they could send him on to another

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destination, to Spain, to the ends of the earth, further west.

the God of all nations was calling. It's the unplanted, weed-infested garden bed that needs the most attention.
The one where the seeds are in the ground and the irrigation system in place can more or less look after itself. You know, John Newton, who wrote the hymn Amazing Grace, former slave ship captain, Anglican vicar, hymn writer, and John Newton's younger friend William Wilberforce, who was the British parliamentarian, whom Newton encouraged to stay in politics.
And the two, I mean, what you probably know about the two is that Newton and Wilberforce were partners in the campaign to abolish slavery. But they were partners in another cause too.
Newton prompted Wilberforce to lobby Prime Minister William Pitt to send a chaplain in 1787 with the First Fleet to Botany Bay.
[25:05] And the chaplain sent was the one Newton nominated, a young evangelical curate, barely 30 years old, named Richard Johnson.

Newton wrote to Wilberforce, who can tell what important consequences may depend upon Mr Johnson's going to New Holland? It may seem but a small event at present, so a foundation stone when it's laid is small compared to the building to be erected on it, but it is the beginning and earnest of the whole.
Johnson himself knew that the mission field before him in Australia included not just the convicts and officials and free settlers who travelled from Europe, but also the Indigenous peoples who had lived in Australia for untold generations before.
to his first daughter born in 1790, he gave the Aboriginal name Milba, and was thus the first European to give a child an Aboriginal name.
Yes, European settlement brought much that is harm, much that was harmful and hard for Indigenous peoples, but it also brought the name of Christ, so that today Henry and Maria proclaim Jesus among, Indigenous brothers and sisters proclaim Jesus in Gilgandra and Pilaga among our brothers and sisters there.
[26:49] people who are going to We need to realise that it's the nature of God's plan that determines the shape of world mission. God's plan is for the salvation of every nation, not for the salvation of every individual.

God's plan is that every people group, every tribe, every clan will glorify him and enjoy him forever.
Leslie Newbigin was a missionary in India for almost four decades in the middle of the 20th century. And in 1953, in some talks he gave, he spoke and then wrote, critiquing an overly cautious approach to world mission. I'm going to read out a lengthy quote, it will come on the screen in three sections, but listen to what he says.
He said, it's taken for granted, this is the approach he's critiquing, it's taken for granted that the missionary obligation is one that has to be met after the needs of the home base have been fully met, that existing gains have to be thoroughly consolidated before we go further afield, that the worldwide church has to be built up with the same sort of prudent calculation and resources and costs as is expected of any business enterprise.
See what he's saying? There's what's taken for granted, we need to build at home before we can send abroad. But he challenges that. He continues, must we not contrast this with the sort of strategy that the New Testament reveals, which seems to be a sort of determination to stake out God's claims to the whole world at once, without expecting that one area should be fully worked out before the next is claimed.
[28:44] Thus the Lord forbids his disciples to stay and argue with those who do not receive them, but tells them to shake off their feet for a testimony and go on. And Paul's missionary planning leaps to the end of the known world, urging him forward from each field of work to the next, not when the church has been fully built up, but when the gospel has been fully preached.

In other words, if we want to be committed to world mission the way the apostle Paul was and the way God is, then we need to have an eye to the frontier. We need to look to the frontier.
Now how do we do that? Well we can do the same things the apostle Paul invited the Roman believers to do. We pray as Paul asked them to pray for him.
We give as Paul sought their support as he headed on to Spain. And we send. And maybe, just maybe, one amongst us might choose to go.

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Or more than one. Earlier in the year when I was preaching on similar themes from Genesis 17, I spoke about frontier people groups.
[30:00] There are 1.9 billion people, almost a quarter of the world's population, living in what we could call frontier people groups.

Frontier people groups are those in which there are fewer than one in 1,000 believers. Fewer than one in 1,000 people are Christians. There are around 3,220 frontier people groups in the world. They're people groups in which there's virtually no self-sustaining church movement. Where for the people group, the vast majority of the people group, there is no access to the gospel or very little access to the gospel.
These people groups represent what I would call the far frontier of world mission. Where do we find them? The majority are in what missiologists call the 10-40 window.
So this is a, you imagine a rectangle imposed on a map of the world between 10 degrees and 40 degrees north latitude. people are in the world and it's a large proportion of the world's population.
[31:17] But significantly, 97.5% of all frontier people groups, sorry, most of the frontier people groups from there, you can sort of see their red dots on that map.

They probably just look like a blur of red at a distance. But you can see them represented there. 97.5% of these people groups are primarily Muslim or Hindu.
So we're looking at Africa, North Africa, Middle East, India, moving across. 50% of frontier peoples live in just 39 mega groups and 80% live in the largest 200.
So 20% of the world's population are in 300 frontier people groups. I mean, this is the frontier of world mission today. The four largest groups are 133 million Bengali Muslims, so Muslims in Bangladesh, 118 million Japanese, 90 million Sheikh Muslims in India, and 67 million Turks.
At present, for every $1,000 that's given to Christian causes, how much do you think is directed towards work amongst the world's un-evangelised peoples?
[32:38] For every $1,000 given, around about $3. See, most missionaries who go out are involved in building up the church in places where the gospel's already been preached.

And that kind of makes sense because most missionaries go where they're invited. But you're not going to be invited to frontier peoples.
You just need to go. So how can we as a church help advance the frontier of world mission? Well, maybe we should throw that question to the church's mission committee.
It's also something you could think about individually as a family. There's great resource online, which is the resource I've used for some of this data.
It's the Joshua Project. Just look up that website, the Joshua Project. Do your own research. Start praying. But what could we do? I mean, here are some ideas. I don't have any elder approval to throw out these ideas, so they're just ideas, right?
[33:49] So I'm not committing to any of them. But we could choose to limit the budget of our church and say actually we're not going to spend any more money beyond a certain level here.

Anything else we raise beyond that we're going to send to frontier work. We could designate a percentage of all church mission to go to frontier giving. So if giving happens to increase here, well frontier giving will increase as well.
We could adopt a frontier people group. We could pick one as a church and pray for them. We could find a mission partner heading to frontier work. We could choose a country in the 1040 window, start praying for it and make a 10-year plan to send one of us there and commit to supporting that person.
Now for the majority of us who don't have the privilege of following in the Apostle Paul's footsteps, preaching where Christ hasn't been named, let's at least lift our eyes and look to the horizon and pray and give and perhaps even send.
That's the far frontier. There's also a near frontier. Everyone in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie and the Hunter has better access to the gospel than the 1.9 billion people living in frontier groups.
[35:22] But not everyone in our area has equal access. Some are harder to reach than others. If there's a far frontier of the unreached at the ends of the earth, there's also a near frontier of the less reached living right next door to us.

So where's the near frontier for us? Maybe it's someone living across the road from you who's moved to Newcastle from one of the countries in the 1040 window.

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Maybe it's a workplace or class or community group you're in where you're the only Christian. Maybe it's a housing complex where the only time anyone says Jesus' name, it's as an expletive. Maybe it's a demographic that our society and our church have just left behind. Maybe it's a suburb people have to drive out of to find a church that preaches the gospel.
Where's the near frontier? Where are the places of relative gospel scarcity and what can we do to carry the gospel to them? What open doors has God put before you?
[36:38] And could you take one step through that door or one of those doors? There's the first question this passage raises for us.

How might we help advance the frontier of world mission? To put it in the terms of Romans 15, will we go to Spain? But there's a second question Romans 15 raises for us and that's will we go to Jerusalem?
Because before Paul went west to Spain he was heading east to Jerusalem. Why was he going to Jerusalem? Look at verse 25. At present however I'm going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it and indeed they owe it to them. For if the nations have come to share in their spiritual blessings they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I've completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected I'll leave for Spain by way of you.
[37:51] I know that when I come to you I'll come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. Why was Paul heading to Jerusalem? He was heading to deliver a collection that the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, Achaia is kind of Greece, had raised for the poor believers in Judea.

Paul wrote a lot about this collection. He mentions it in 1 Corinthians 16. He devotes two whole chapters to it in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. He mentions it in one of his speeches in Acts. He clearly considered this trip to Jerusalem to be very important.
But geographically if you think about it, it was taking him in the opposite direction to the frontier of mission. He's got to head east to Jerusalem when he wants to go west to Spain.
So it's important enough for Paul that he's willing to accept a significant delay in his long term plans. Not just a delay, but but a significant risk.
In verse 32, as he's asking for prayers from the Romans, among those prayers is, sorry, verse 31, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea.
[39:08] He recognises that there are people in Judea who oppose him and perhaps will even try to kill him. If they have their way, he'll never get to Spain. So why was Paul willing to accept both the delay and the risk of this trip to Jerusalem?

What was so important? Well, he did it for two reasons. First, for the relief of physical need.
Verse 26, it's the contribution, a contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. them. It was to share in material blessings with their brothers and sisters in Judea.
And many people, many people in our world today still live in conditions of severe poverty. Globally, one in ten people live on less than three dollars a day.
One in ten. And the rate of reduction of extreme poverty has stalled in recent years. It's not getting any better.
[40:23] Three point seven billion people, that's 44% of humanity, live on less than $8.30 a day. These are probably American dollars. people in wealth.

There are vast inequalities of wealth in our world and people who are living in the depths of poverty. The believers in Macedonia and Achaia considered the poverty of their Christian brothers and sisters in Judea and they were moved to do something about it.
Now I realise we live at times here even in Australia of financial stress. The cost of living are rising. Fuel is expensive. Housing is expensive. Going to the supermarket is expensive. Some of us here are living week to week. But that's not me and I know it's not all of us.
my whole life I've enjoyed relative financial security and material comfort and it's not for any merit on my part. It's due to living in a wealthy country.
[41:39] It's due to having a stable childhood with hard-working parents and it's due to enjoying the generosity of God's people to full-time Christian workers. 75 years ago my grandfather had to give up full-time ministry because he was so poor he couldn't afford to feed his family essentially.

Certainly not to send to university. But I've never been in want. I'm well paid and supplied and I have been my whole ministry life.

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For those who like me enjoy material abundance well let's remember those one in ten people in our world who live on less than three dollars a day. If my natural brother Jake if he were in financial distress I would help him in an instant no matter where he lived in the world.
He'd live on the other side of the world and I'd send whatever he needed. And here we are and we have spiritual brothers and sisters who are hungry and cold.
The churches Paul had planted gave and Paul delayed the next phase of his evangelistic mission in order to relieve the poverty of their brothers and sisters in Christ.
[43:02] And it's so easy for us today actually because there are organisations like Anglican Aid and Compassion, Baptist World Aid, CBM Australia that make it easy to contribute to the needs of brothers and sisters in other parts of the world.

Christmas has traditionally been a time when believers have given to the needy. As you plan your Christmas meals and Christmas gifts could you remember the poor this year?
Well there's the first reason Paul considered the gift to be important, for the relief to meet the needs of the poor. The second reason was as a tangible expression of love and unity.
It was the expression of fellowship between the believers in the nations and the Jewish believers in Jerusalem and Judea. Paul says in fact that the believers in the nations owe it to the Jewish believers.
There's this sense of obligation but more than being obligated he says they're pleased to make a contribution. contribution. The contribution there is fellowship, it's sharing.
[44:15] This collection symbolically brought Paul's Gentile mission to a point of completion. The gospel had gone out from the Jews, from Jerusalem and now this act of love and giving, returning to Jerusalem, was bringing that full circle.

with the sharing then expressed in both directions. The purpose of mission is not mission.
The purpose of mission is love. That is, the purpose of mission is to build the church, the household of God, as a community of people who know God's love, who glorify God for his love and who are learning to love one another.
So, let us not only go to Spain, that is the frontier of mission, but let's go to Jerusalem. That is, let us ask how we may express a fellowship of love with the worldwide church, especially with those in need.
Well, they're the first two questions this passage raises for us. I just want to deal briefly with a third, which is raised less by Romans 15 than by the aftermath of Romans 15. The third question is this.
[45:37] We've seen, are we willing to, can we honour God by looking to the frontier of mission? Will we honour God by loving the worldwide church and those in need? Third question, are we willing to honour God even when our plans to honour God fail?

See, Paul outlines his travel plans. He's praying for and planning for, hoping for a peaceful reception in Jerusalem, a swift passage to Rome and then the journey on to Spain.
Things didn't turn out as Paul intended. When he reached Jerusalem, the Jews there, the non-believing Jews, attempted to kill him.
They tried to murder him. He was seized by Romans, the Roman soldiers, for his protection. He was then taken to Caesarea. He was imprisoned in Caesarea for two years.
Eventually, appealing to Caesar, he was then escorted under guard, still a prisoner, to Rome. While en route, he was shipwrecked. Eventually, arrived in Rome, spent a further two years there in prison.
[46:58] He was released sometime around AD 62. We know he had subsequent travels in the eastern Mediterranean. Did he ever reach Spain at all?

Possibly. The evidence is a bit mixed. There's some post-New Testament evidence that suggests he might have. But if he did, he certainly didn't get there for long, because around about AD 64, he's arrested again and ends up being executed in Rome.
Now, we may make plans to honour the God of all nations, but our plans are not always God's plans. And perhaps God will call you to honour him even when your plans fail.
A few years ago, after much planning and prayer and preparation, we as a church helped to send Matt and Grace to the far frontier, to live amongst a frontier people group.
Their plans failed. They went. The business Matt started was rapidly rendered redundant by the rise of AI.

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[48:11] But worse than that, more fatally, the government didn't renew a visa, something completely out of their hands, and they were forced to return to Australia. They're now living back near Port Macquarie, Grace is teaching again, Matt's working for a church, they're raising their young children.

The thing they struggle with, Matt says, is working out whether or not they should be fighting to get back there, or accepting the closed door as the Lord directing them, redirecting them.
But I asked Matt, I mean, they're still wrestling with that, I asked Matt how he's dealing with the disappointment of their failed plans. He said it's taken their trust in God's sovereignty from something they knew theologically to something that they have had to live in their experience.
Let me quote some of his words. Here's what he said, the feeling can be, what are you doing God? But turn back, he is doing amazing things and we have to trust him.
Like that verse in James, we make plans but it's only if the Lord wills that we can do what we plan to do.
[49:30] At the end of the day, we want to do what the Lord wills and not anything else. Location is not really to do with faithfulness. God wants us to be living out obedience to him and the gospel wherever we are.

part of living out our faith is making plans to honour the God of all nations, plans to go to Spain, plans to go to Jerusalem, plans to advance the frontier of mission, plans to express the fellowship of love.
And part of living out our faith is resolving to honour God even when our plans fail. Only may God work whatever he will through us, that the gospel may advance and that love may increase until his plans reach their completion for his glory and for our joy.
Amen.

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