

Paul the Missionary

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 10th of March 2002. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled Paul the Missionary and is based on Romans chapter 15 verses 14 to 33.

And if you would turn in the Bibles to Romans chapter 15 page 924.

And for those who are visiting today this is almost the end of a series of sermons on this letter to the Romans. I think this is number 23 out of 24. And next week we'll have a party to finish.

Let's pray first. Heavenly Father we thank you that you speak to us clearly through your word and pray that you may do so this morning. That these words may be written on our hearts and in our minds.

[1 : 0 3] That we may trust them and do them for the glory of Jesus Christ. Amen. As most of you know before I came to Holy Trinity here in Doncaster nearly six years ago I spent three years in the United Kingdom doing some further study and working in a church in a place called Cheltenham.

Cheltenham is a place where retired generals and colonels go and where there are lots and lots of spies. The main thing about Cheltenham is that it's the centre of the equivalent of ASIO.

So therefore it's a place full of eccentric people. And one of my jobs in the church where I was ministering was every month or sometimes three weeks I would take the early service which was at the very civilised time let me tell you of 9.30am and which was a book of common prayer communion service in the old Norman church and on a good day we'd get a bit over 30 people who would attend.

And most of them I discovered in the course of three years seemed to me to be highly eccentric. On one particular day and let me tell you this happened at occasional intervals for other reasons in other places at times on one particular day our staff and many of the congregation were at the cathedral in Gloucester for the ordination of one of our female staff members as priest.

And so in the intercessions at this service I prayed for, amongst other things for Audrey being ordained today priest. At which point one lady who was a regular attender and highly and unusual person called out in a very loud voice really especially in the middle of intercessions let me say Priestess!

[2 : 4 9] And this prompted a person who was there for the very first time I'm not giving you ideas by the way This prompted a man who was there for the very first time to shout out in response to her Priesthood of all believers Well this, I must say shocked me a little bit But it does raise the issue or it did Is an Anglican minister a priest or not?

Now in the Old Testament priests offered sacrifices They would take the animals that people came to offer at the temple or the tabernacle before that and they were involved in slaying these animals sprinkling its blood over people and altars and so on offering up incense to God and then for certain sacrifices taking the blood into the most holy place and so on In the medieval times the Christian church the Church of Rome or the Catholic Church the priests there would view themselves as offering up sacrifice in the celebration of what we call the Lord's Supper That is, they would call it the Mass the sacrifice of the Mass and they believed that in some sense they were re-sacrificing Jesus on the cross and so therefore they were priests In the 16th century the Anglican church broke away from the church in Rome but the reformers who established the Church of England as it was called then though they rejected the theology of the sacrifice of the Mass because Jesus was offered once for all on the cross nonetheless for some reason they kept the name priest for the ministers of the Anglican church and ever since let me say there have been plenty of Anglican ministers who have wished that they had changed the name from priest to presbyter or minister or pastor or something like that

Now in this passage in Romans 15 right near the end of the letter in one sense Paul has finished what he wants to say he's now adding some personal touches in one sense to his letter to the Romans and here he does four things he reflects on his call to be a minister he secondly reflects on his strategy as a minister then he declares his immediate plans for his future ministry and then fourthly he urges prayer for his ministry but at the heart part of all of this lies his understanding of who he is as an apostle and a minister and his definition or description is that he is in a sense a priest let me say it's the only time in the New Testament where one individual other than Jesus is called in Christian terms of ministry a priest or their ministry is described in priestly terms so firstly

Paul reflects on his call to be an apostle and a minister he begins this section in verse 14 by saying I myself feel confident about you my brothers and sisters that you yourselves are full of goodness filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another nevertheless on some points I've written to you rather boldly by way of reminder because of the grace given me by God the gift if you like given me by God that is that Paul is an apostle so his apostleship his ministry is firstly a gift from God that's where his authority derives from from the God's gift of apostleship to him and as a result he's saying I've written to you rather boldly I've not shirked from saying some difficult things to you and not least on the issue of the unity between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians which we've seen running through this letter from the beginning and then in verse 16 he defines his ministry as an apostle that is 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 now striking language it's the language of the Old Testament it's priestly language and just as a priest in the Old Testament would offer a sacrifice of a slain animal or sometimes other things to God on behalf of somebody else

Paul describes himself in priestly terms as offering a sacrifice to God but the sacrifice that he is offering is not of a slain animal it is the offering of the Gentiles and the means of his sacrifice is not through slitting throats but through the preaching of the gospel you see Paul understands himself as a priest in the sense that in the preaching of the gospel to people who are not Christians when they are converted they in a sense become an offering acceptable to God that Paul in a sense offers to God as a priest now these are striking words because Paul's ministry was primarily to Gentiles that is to non-Jewish people and in the Old Testament and in the Judaism of Paul's own day Gentiles were regarded as highly unclean and were forbidden from entry into the inner courts of the temple the temple was like a set of concentric courts the most holy place in the middle high priest only could go there once a year the next outer court was for priests generally only they could enter then the court of the Israelite men then the court of women and then beyond that the Gentiles could go only on the extremities and there was a sign at the point beyond which Gentiles could not go and up I think 19 steps they had to go to get to the next stage anyway a sign saying that Gentiles enter here under promise of death later on when Paul actually returns to Jerusalem he's arrested on the trumped up charge of actually having taken a Gentile into the forbidden area in Acts chapter 21 but here Paul is saying that that old taboo by which Gentiles were regarded as unacceptable and unclean in Jewish eyes is broken down by the gospel of Jesus Christ the gospel purifies forgives cleanses through the death of Jesus on the cross and received through faith in him and him alone so no longer is there this sense of Jews only enjoy the privilege of approaching God and being an acceptable offering to God now through the gospel that Paul has preached

[9 : 41] Gentiles too are acceptable to God through faith in Christ and hence Paul says his ministry is priestly the language here also derives in another sense from the Old Testament at the climax of perhaps the greatest book of prophecy the book of Isaiah comes a picture of the Gentiles being drawn into Jerusalem in praise of God and as an offering to God and so here Paul sees that Old Testament expectation being fulfilled through his preaching of the gospel of Christ not that Paul himself claims the fulfillment of Old Testament it's the gospel of Jesus that fulfills the Old Testament and brings in the Gentiles to worship God but more than that too in the Old Testament the people of God ancient Israel were described as a royal priesthood that is they as a nation and individually members of it were priestly in their function that is they were to be the means by which the Gentile nations of the world came to God but through the history of Israel in the Old Testament we see consistently that they failed and in fact kept on excluding the Gentiles from their midst so Paul sees himself as fulfilling what ancient Israel was meant to do that is bring the Gentiles to God in union with Jewish people now that same description of Israel as a whole in the Old Testament is applied to

Christians in the New so in 1 Peter chapter 2 for example Christians are called to be a royal priesthood so what Paul is describing about himself here might in one sense apply to him uniquely as an apostle to the Gentiles but on the other hand is actually what you and I and all Christians of every age and place are called to be priests that is ministers of the gospel to people who are not Christians so that they come to place their faith and trust in Christ and therefore be an offering acceptable to God so Paul sees himself then as doing what Israel is meant to do as doing what all Christians are meant to do and fulfilling that great commission of Jesus before he ascended to heaven going to all the earth to the ends of the earth proclaiming the name of Jesus and baptizing people of all nations that is what you and I have an obligation to do as well as St. Paul maybe not in the same way as St. Paul maybe not as distinctively or full time but nonetheless it is the obligation on every Christian to be a priest that is in the ministry of the gospel mediating God's gospel and word to the world that does not know it two other things about this ministry of St. Paul firstly when he boasts in it he boasts in Jesus accomplishments that is whatever Paul does is Jesus working in him and through him so he says in verse 17 in Christ

Jesus then I have reason to boast of my work for God he's not bragging about his own ability his own energy all the churches that he's planted and grown he's boasting about what Jesus has done in him and through him for I'll not venture he goes on to say in verse 18 to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles so it's not Paul's achievement that he boasts about and brags about but rather it's Jesus work in him and the means by which Jesus worked in him he explains at the rest of verse 18 and 19 by word and deed that is Jesus worked through the preaching of the word that Paul did accompanied by his actions his care for people his actions to support what he said so he didn't just say do what I say and not what I do but he modeled Christian living as well as preached Christian living but notice that both are there you can't have one without the other in the ministry of the gospel we need to preach the word but our preaching of the word our sharing of the gospel needs to be backed up by Christian living that is an integrity but so too when we live good Christian lives that might commend the gospel we still need to be able to share the word of the gospel to other people not only the word and the deed but also he goes on to say in verse 19 the power of signs and wonders they were particular marks of apostolic ministry

Paul claims in 2 Corinthians and there are plenty of examples not only of Paul's power of miracles and signs and wonders in the acts of the apostles but also of other apostles as well thirdly Jesus worked in and through Paul by the power of the spirit of God not independent of the preaching of the word but Paul preaching the gospel that the spirit of God would take and apply onto people's hearts and minds so that internally they are converted and place their faith in Jesus Christ because in the end conversion is a spiritual work of God not a human work of preaching we have to preach God takes the word and changes people's hearts and minds we also bear in mind the time and again in scripture the sword of the spirit the power of the spirit if you like is in fact the word of God so all of this means by which Christ is working is to give the word power in people's lives to change so that's the first point

Paul's reflection on his ministry as an apostle and as a priest secondly he reflects on his strategy how he went about doing that ministry before Jesus ascended to heaven some weeks after he rose from the dead he commanded his followers to preach the gospel and at the beginning of the acts of the apostles he says it in this way to go to Jerusalem that is the heart of Judaism of Jesus day to Judea which is the surrounding rural area around Jerusalem to Samaria which is sort of like the second cousins of the Jews they were not quite Jews but there was sort of an ancient blood relationship that's the next area along it's sort of like going to New Zealand I suppose sort of look down your nose at it that sort of thing and then from there to the ends of the earth that was the command to go out from Jerusalem to every place to the very ends of the earth and to that command

[16:38] Paul had been obedient in his life he writes this letter about 57 AD thereabouts give or take a year or two so it's about 25 years after Jesus rose from the dead and to date he says in verse 19 he has preached the gospel as from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum Illyricum is what is in modern day Albania former Yugoslavia roughly on the border of those two countries on the Adriatic sea Paul is saying that in a sense the whole sweep of the gospel has spread from Jerusalem all around that area the Middle East around what is modern day Lebanon Syria Turkey across to Greece up to modern day Bulgaria and Albania and Yugoslavia and so on and he's saying the gospel has gone that far that's what I've done so far his strategy he goes on to say in verse 20 I make it my ambition to proclaim the good news not where Christ

Jesus has already been named that is where there are already Christian churches so that I do not build on someone else's foundation but as it's written those who've never been told of him shall see and those who have never heard of him shall understand Paul is a church planter that is he starts churches in places where there are no Christians and no churches and his strategy is to do that rather than build on someone else's foundation in a church but also not just to go to every little village and house but rather to set up bases in key strategic centres and cities so we see in the Acts of the Apostles how Paul goes for example to Ephesus which was in the area in those days called Asia but in modern day western Turkey and there he was for over a year a couple of years preaching the gospel but he says at the end of that ministry time that in effect the gospel has now reached all of

Asia because he goes to a place where people come to trade so they come in from the rural surrounds they trade they do their business they hear the gospel being preached there and they take it back to their own villages it's a strategic plan if you like for Paul to go to cities in areas so he goes to Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea and Athens and Corinth the leading cities of each of those Greco-Roman provinces and areas so that the church can be established in the center and from there will easily spread out into the rural surrounds of that area Paul's strategy then is firstly to go to unreached people groups as they're called sometimes today it's one reason why the Mitchell family whom we support with CMS are in Tatarstan a fairly much unreached people group in the world today to plant a church there secondly to go to key strategic places or cities or centers it's why for example CMS in Australia sends missionaries to Paris and Brussels and Milan where the

Christian gospel is very much a rarity it's why we support AFES work here in Melbourne at Deakin and Melbourne universities because they're strategic centers from which students will go to all sorts of places in work and business and so on it's why the Melbourne diocese at the moment in its vision 2020 has got a vision to plant churches in the new suburbs of Melbourne where there is no Anglican presence even if that is in sometimes at the cost of trying to rationalize or combine other Anglican churches in other places to give more resources to do that it's why the diocesan vision is trying to encourage church planting which in the past we've not done very well at all and it's Paul's commitment to this strategic ministry of church planting that is the reason why he's yet to go to Rome he gives almost an apology for that in verse 22 this is the reason that I've so often been hindered from coming to you maybe the Roman Christians were saying well you know how about coming to us you've gone to all these other places we want you to come here but Paul is saying in effect my priority has been to plant new churches somebody else started the church in Rome

Paul's never been there at this point anyway we don't know who started it but we certainly know there were Christians in Rome at least 10 years before Paul wrote this letter from other documents of Roman history Paul doesn't want to build on someone else's foundation that's why Rome has been a lower priority for him but now he says in verse 23 in all these regions that he's been to there's no further place for him that is the gospel has now gone to all of what is modern day Turkey and Greece and the Middle East and presumably Egypt and North Africa as well so now he has to look further afield and what he wants to do is to go to Rome not to plant a church but merely to pass through on his way to Spain for in Paul's day it seems that the gospel had yet to reach Spain and in many senses that was the ends of the earth of the Roman Empire though they had conquered Britain by this stage I guess and that's a bit further but for Paul that's the next strategic step to go on the way he'll pass through

[22 : 05] Rome for mutual encouragement as he said in chapter 1 but not to plant a church there not to build on someone else's foundation but to move on and go on to Spain an unreached people group place his time in Rome will be limited but he says at the end of verse 24 that I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you once I've enjoyed your company for a little while to be sent on by you is not just to say well come on get on your way off you go by but actually has the sense of that you can provide for my needs that you will provide not only prayers but financial resources to enable me to continue a mission to Spain where there is no Christian church and here is another strategy of Christian ministry and mission being reflected here that is where existing churches support ministry to non-existing churches in evangelism and church planting that is you cannot expect non-Christian people to support the ministry of the gospel and you cannot expect brand new

Christians to support the ministry of the gospel it's why we support missionaries in all sorts of different places so that out of the riches of our own resources we give for the benefit of planting and growing churches in other places so that's the second point Paul reflecting on his strategy in ministry thirdly he now declares his immediate future plans he said I want to go to Rome and on there to Spain but now he says what he's got to do first from Corinth where he writes this letter in southern Greece on the Peloponnese he plans to go not west to Rome and Spain but firstly east to Jerusalem and the reason to do that is because there is a collection of money that he has to take to the Christians mainly Jewish Christians in Jerusalem so he says in verse 25 at present however I'm going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem

Macedonia is northern Greece and probably refers to the churches at Philippi Thessalonica and Berea that Paul had planted some years before Achaia is where he is now Corinth and Athens nearby as well and so those Christian churches that Paul has planted mainly Gentile Christians have taken up a collection Paul refers to it in other places of his letters as well that is generous and that is supporting the poor Christians in Jerusalem we're not sure why they were poor there was a serious famine ten years before Paul wrote this letter in the late 40s AD in Palestine but there's no record of that continuing in the 50s it may well be because the Christians in Jerusalem were being persecuted or oppressed economically by the Jews and the Romans in Jerusalem and so that Paul is going to offer them some support financially we might well ask why does Paul take time out to do this if he's a minister of the gospel to the

Gentiles why doesn't he just give the money to his church wardens or his treasurer I mean the treasurer in Corinth where he writes a man by the name of Erastus had become a Christian the treasurer of the city why not give it to him to take the money over to Jerusalem why not set free Paul to keep preaching the gospel and get to Spain earlier well the reason that Paul decides to take this money personally to Jerusalem is because this is a very important venture indeed this is more than an act of compassion to the poor you see this is a very tangible expression of non-Jewish Christians the Gentile Christians of Greece Macedonia and Achaia in partnership with the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and so it's fundamental to the gospel that Paul does this as an expression of the sort of Christian unity that he's actually been commanding the Roman church to practice as we saw for example last week in Romans 14 and 15 that is the gospel brings peace between

Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians breaking down all racial and ethnic borders and boundaries and so this very collection is actually fundamental to the gospel as an expression of Gentile generosity to Jewish Christians as well hopefully as Jewish Christian generosity in receiving it from Gentile Christians so this collection then is quite important for the sake of the gospel and it's why Paul takes it notice that in verse 26 and 27 he uses the word share he says Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources and then in verse 27 the second half if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings they ought also to be of service to them in material things now the word share there is actually a strong word it's not just that you give something to somebody else but it's got the sense of fellowship the Greek word's *koinonia* and it's to do with fellowship or partnership together in ministry and in the gospel so Paul is saying here that there is a substantial partnership and fellowship being expressed in this collection between Gentile

[27 : 34] Christians and Jewish Christians and that is what the gospel is about and that is why Paul thinks it's a high enough priority for him himself to take this collection back to Jerusalem notice too how he says that these Gentile Christians in Greece have been pleased to share in verse 26 and again in verse 27 they were pleased to do this that is there was a delight in them giving to these Christians in Jerusalem ties in with what Paul says in another of his letters God loves a cheerful giver I guess there's a challenge here for us in our giving are we pleased to give someone once said to me that if we're not pleased to give if we don't find joy and cheerfulness in giving the answer is not stop giving but give more until we find joy and pleasure in giving try it and find out if it works or not but not only is it their pleasure to give it's also their duty there is both duty and a delight in discharging the duty so verse 27 says they were pleased to do this and indeed they owe it to them that's because in a sense the the origins or source of the gospel come from the believers in

Jerusalem and so there is a in one sense a spiritual dependency not meaning that word wrongly but of these Gentile Christians back to their forebears in the faith if you like back in Jerusalem there is a duty of them to express their partnership and gratitude back after he's gone to Jerusalem Paul says at the end of that paragraph he'll head on to Spain via Rome and be with the Roman Christians for a while so Paul has described his ministry he's described his strategy of ministry he's described his immediate future plans and finally in this chapter he urges prayer for his ministry if Paul who is one of the great apostles needs and asks for prayer how much more ought we as well see even somebody like Paul needs the prayer support of others and he urges them to pray not just a casual prayer the verse 30 has got the sense of wrestling in prayer being earnest in prayer is how it's translated in our version here I appeal to you brothers and sisters by our Lord Jesus

Christ and by the love of the spirit that's a fairly strong appeal to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf and then he mentions two things that he wants prayer for firstly rescue from the unbelievers in Jerusalem presumably Paul knew that his reputation was still mud amongst the Jews of Jerusalem remember that Paul was a Jew he was a very ardent almost fanatical and zealous Pharisee he put Christians to death before he was miraculously converted himself on the road to Damascus and the shock of that if you like defection from Judaism to Christian faith still rankled amongst the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem 25 years later Paul knew that there was an element of danger for him when he went to Jerusalem so he asks for prayer for rescue when he arrives in Jerusalem sometime later after writing this letter we read in the Acts of the Apostles that he's arrested on a trumped up charge but the prayer is answered because his life is spared the second thing he asks prayer for in the second bit of verse 31 is that my ministry to

Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints that is the offering of this collection see Paul knew that there was still tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians and so on the one hand while he's got these Gentile Christians to give generously to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem he is also praying that the Jewish Christians will exercise generous spirits in receiving this offering from Gentile Christians in Greece we don't know the outcome of that the Acts of the Apostles doesn't tell us whether the offering was acceptable or not but still note how Paul is anxious for this Gentile Jewish unity to be expressed so beyond Jerusalem he says in verse 32 by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company God's will was for Paul to go to Rome he does end up there but he ends up there a prisoner a prisoner from Judea taken by ship through a shipwreck to Rome before facing Caesar we don't know whether

Paul ever got to Spain there's a tradition from the end of the first century AD that he did it's mentioned in the letter of a person called Clement not in the New Testament but written in 96 AD that's still in existence today that Paul had gone on from Rome but the other tradition is also that he dies a martyr's death under Nero the emperor of Rome in the 60s AD notice that Paul's prayer here is that by God's will this happens that is prayer is not Paul telling God this is my will I want you to adhere to my will but prayer is submitting to God's will saying like Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane not my will but yours be done praying as we do in the Lord's prayer that the Lord's will be done prayer is an act of submission and humility then asking for discernment and submission to the will of God so Paul has stated what his ministry is a priestly ministry of the gospel he's reflected on his strategy of ministry going to unreached groups and in cities and so on not building on another's foundation he's talked about his immediate and important plans to take this collection to Jerusalem because it's such an important act of the gospel and he's urged prayer for his rescue and also that this offering is acceptable he finishes this section by praying a blessing a priestly blessing priestly in the Old

[33 : 53] Testament sense of praying for other people the peace that is so common in the priestly blessings of the Old Testament the God of peace be with all of you he says peace because that is the key fruit of the gospel as Paul has already told us in chapter 5 and peace because that's what Jews and Gentiles who are Christians need in their relationships with each other and peace to all of you because he's not praying for one group but for all of them to be in unity praising their God and Saviour peace be with all of you amen