

Gospel Ambition

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- [0 : 00] Dear Lord, we thank you that in your great mercy you bring us here together as your people. Lord, we will only understand the Bible by the work of your Spirit.
- We pray, Lord, that you'll open our hearts to the truth of the book of Romans, and we pray this in your Son's name. Amen. Good evening, everyone. Have a seat, please. My name is Eric, for those of you who don't know me.
- I'm part of the ministry team here at St. John's. I'm just going to move this down here. We're working on the book of Romans together, so if you can have your Bibles open to the passage that Kathy just read for us, that would be terrific. It's page 949 in your Bibles, 949.
- Happy Canada Day. Any Canadians here? Two days late? Yeah. Happy Americans. What's the thing called tomorrow? The South of Canada Day celebration.
- I just want to say, so we're the first, you're the fourth. I'm just saying. It's kind of like you copied us, wasn't it? You know what I've done?
- [1 : 05] We've been doing the book of Romans since September. Last year, right? September last year. So I went through, this is how interesting my life is, right? So I went through the internet to count all the sermons we've had on the book of Romans since September last year.
- Do you know how many there were? How many we've done? There's 15 chapters. It's more than 15. How many do you think we've done? 112. Kathy Ross. No. It's 38.
- We've done 38 sermons, talks on the book. That's about 19 hours on the book of Romans we've done. Pretty exciting, eh? How well do you know it? It's pretty tough work, isn't it? I'm saying that because tonight, this passage we're doing tonight, is kind of the start of the end of the book of Romans.
- It's the start of the conclusion to this just fantastic part of God's Word. But you've got to remember, this is Paul writing it. And Paul writes without any word count limitation.
- So his conclusion is two chapters long. So that's Paul. And we all know what Paul's like. He has run on sentences. It's kind of like saying, I can see Vancouver Island, but I'm on the ferry, so it's still four more hours.
- [2 : 07] So we're kind of there, but we're not there yet. So as we read through this, as Kathy read through it for us, there's kind of two strange things that Paul would say as a conclusion to these fantastic 15 chapters of the book of Romans.
- Here's the first one. He kind of says, by the way, all those things I've been telling you about for the last 15 chapters, or for us 38 talks, you already know it.
- You already know it, so I'm just here to remind you about it. Did you pick that up as you went through it? It's right here. So come with me. We're on page 949, chapter 15, verse 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.

But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder. Now that's kind of an odd way to do your conclusion to your letter. You know all that stuff I've been telling you? That kind of would have taken you an hour to read that scroll so far?

[3 : 11] You kind of already know it. I'm just reminding you. And it's weird also because if you've been tracking with us in the book of Romans, it's really hard. And I've actually preached a whole bunch of these sermons at different services, and I still don't understand it completely.

So were they super smart? Were they just super smart in Rome and they actually understood it? Or is there something else going on? Right. That's the first question. Here's the second question. After that, Paul goes on to say, By the way, in conclusion, since I first became a Christian all those years ago, to the time I wrote this letter to you, this is what I've been doing with my life.

I've been marching around the ancient world, the ancient Roman Empire, and I've been telling people about Jesus because that's the job that God has given me. God has put his hand on me and said, You're going to be the one who brings a message about Jesus to the Gentiles.

Gentiles is kind of like a Bible word. It means people who are not Jewish. So in the ancient world, ancient Roman Empire, you had Jewish people, and then they became Jewish Christians, and you have Gentiles, and they became Gentile Christians, and both groups of people were becoming Christians.

Paul's job is to bring the message of salvation to the Gentiles. That's the second way he starts to end the letter. Now, why would he do that? First, he says, You guys know everything I've just told you 15 chapters ago?

[4 : 22] And the second thing he says is, By the way, this is what I'm up to. I'm actually telling people about Jesus, especially the Gentiles. Okay. We're going to try to figure that out tonight, right? In the 20 minutes we have together.

Here's our first clue. Here's our first clue. We are in the conclusion to the letter to the Romans. We've just talked about that. And in the introduction or the conclusion to these letters, it's very important because we've got a little snapshot of what the book is actually about.

Right? So I'm going to make you flip your Bible to Romans chapter 1 right now. This is the only time we're going to flip tonight. I know you're tired. It's a long weekend, but we're just going to flip it once. So come with me. Leave one finger in page 949, and come back with me to the beginning of the letter of Romans 939.

Okay. So at Romans chapter 1, verses 1 to 7 are Paul introducing himself and saying hello to the Romans, and then really the letter starts at verse 8.

So at Romans chapter 1, verse 8, it's one of those verses you kind of read through really quickly, not realizing how important it is when you're reading the letter. Here's what it says. First, so first and foremost, first, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

[5 : 39] You see what he said? Rome is in the middle of the Roman Empire. Right? That makes sense. It's predominantly a Gentile church, Gentile and Jewish church, and from there, the message of Christ is going out to all the Roman Empire.

He's never visited the church, though. Right? So Paul is a minister to the Gentiles, and he's in a fellowship with these guys in Rome who are doing the same ministry.

Right? That's why this is the background to the whole letter of the book of Romans. So it's not surprising when we get to Romans 15, and Paul starts his conclusion by saying, the reason I'm actually telling you this stuff is because God has given me the job of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.

And that's what you guys are doing, too. And that's what's behind the whole letter to the book of Romans. It's actually about the mission to the Roman Empire. That's the background to the book of Romans.

Okay, so Paul kind of gives a little bit of a geography lesson here. I don't know if you picked it up. It's in verse 19. So I'm going to read it for us.

[6 : 43] We're back on page 950. He's going to explain what's happening, what God is doing in the Roman Empire. We're at verse 19, page 950, chapter 15.

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.

I'm going to try to explain to you what he's actually talking about. This might confuse you more than anything, but I'm going to give it a go anyways, okay? So I want you to pretend you're standing at the eastern edge of the Mediterranean Ocean, okay?

If this doesn't work for you, I'll show you. I've got a Bible with a map in the back of it, right? This might work for you better, but you're standing at the edge of the eastern end of the Mediterranean Ocean. So that way is North Africa, that way up there, up behind you is Palestine, that's Turkey, and that is Europe over there.

Okay, so what Paul is saying, Illyricum is actually Yugoslavia. It's like present-day Yugoslavia. So what Paul is saying, for the last part of my life, what I've been doing under the hand of God is to bring Jesus, not to Jerusalem, because that's the Jewish part, but other people are doing that.

[7 : 50] I've been bringing it to Antioch in Syria. I've been bringing it to Ephesus, which is in Turkey. I've been bringing it to Athens, right? Nice people, good food, bad public transport, right?

I've been bringing it to Athens, right? And I've been bringing it to Illyricum, which is back in Yugoslavia, and I've been bringing it to Rome, right?

And after Rome, I'm going to bring it to, what's behind Rome? It's not Canada. It's closer than that. What's behind Rome? Who knows? Spain. Spain.

Keep reading. Keep reading in the book of Rome as it talks about, after Rome, I'm going to bring the gospel to Spain. So what he's actually saying is, see what God's doing in the world? God is bringing the gospel to the Gentiles through the northern edge of the Mediterranean Ocean, and it's through me that he's doing that.

And therefore, you guys in Rome are super important to us, right? You're a center of mission, and therefore, what's happening in your church, how you guys get along is really important, not just for yourselves, but because of God's mission.

[8 : 54] And so he's got this connection to this church in Rome. That's the background. That's the background to the book of Romans, and I think it's going to help us to explain what's actually happening in this passage.

So Paul says, God is working through me to bring the message of salvation to the Gentiles, and you guys in Rome are a really important part of this. That's why it's so important what happens in your church.

If Jews and Gentiles do not get along in Rome, how's it going to work anywhere else in the empire? You guys have to change to follow Christ together. Okay, we're going to look at three things about Paul and how he looks at mission, and then we're going to look at what those things might tell us about our mission at St. John's with that background in mind.

And I'm saying that because we actually are on mission. If you're a Christian, if you've accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, you're actually part of God's mission. The very fact that you proclaim Christ means you're part of his mission, and we actually go out as a community and as individuals for God's mission.

That's part of what we do. Okay, here's the three things. Number one, Paul brings news about Jesus, and God shows people that it's true.

[10 : 06] Right? Paul brings news about Christ, and God shows people that it's true. That's the first thing. Here's the second thing. Paul had a plan, and he accepted that God might have a better plan.

Right? Paul had a plan, and he accepted that God might have a better plan. Here's the last one. Patience.

Patience. That's the last one. Patience. Patience. Okay. Here's the first one. Paul brings news about Jesus, and God shows people it's true.

Read with me from verse 15. Halfway through verse 15. I'm going to start at the word because. So we're halfway through verse 15. 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.

Paul's actually using an image from the Jewish synagogue, from the Jewish temple, where the Jewish people believed that God and his people, God used the priest, the Jewish priest, to be the intermediary between himself and his people.

[11 : 33] Right? So God spoke to the priest, priest spoke to the people, and the other way around. Paul's not saying he's the priest. In fact, the reason God gave the Jewish people that is so they would understand that Christ is the priest now.

Right? But he's using the image to say what's actually happening is the gospel that God's given us, the news about Jesus, right? God has chosen Paul to be the intermediary between the gospel and God's people.

That's the image that he's actually using. So he's actually bringing the word of God to God's people, the message about Jesus to God's people. At the same time, God shows people it's true.

What does it say? The Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit, are sanctifying the Gentiles to make them acceptable to God. The Holy Spirit's actually supernaturally changing these people to be acceptable to God.

So Paul's proclaiming, and the Holy Spirit is changing people's hearts. He talks about signs and wonders, right? Signs and wonders. What were the things that Paul was doing? He was doing things like healing people.

[12 : 29] And the purpose behind that was so people would believe the news he was saying about Jesus Christ. Right? That was the purpose behind the signs and the wonders. His deeds, right?

Word and deeds. So he was acting as a Christian to be different so that people would actually look at what he said and say, well, that's probably true. Because look at how he's acting. Right?

So he proclaims the word and God shows people it's true. That's what he was doing. Paul doesn't make it up. He doesn't change the message.

He brings the message to the ancient world. That's what he's on about. Here's the important part. What do you think was the content of that gospel that God brought to the Gentiles?

What's the content of the gospel that Paul brought to the Roman church? What do you think it is? What are the details of the gospel that God brought to the Roman church?

[13 : 30] I'm going to let you talk to the person beside you about this. I know you're kind of tired so I'll wake you up a little bit. Now if you can think about what is it? What is the gospel that he's talking to the Romans about?

What is that? And if you're here and you're like I don't know what you're talking about. What's the guy at the front talking about? Talk about how the Canucks can win the Stanley Cup next year. And if you're a Boston fan there's the door.

And if you don't want to do any of those just talk about how nice it is to have sunshine on the weekend. Okay? That's fine. But if you want to what's the content of the gospel that Paul is bringing to the Romans?

You've got 30 seconds. Talk to the person beside you about it. What do you think it is?

What's that? What do you think it is? I don't know. In here I don't know. What does it say? That's the whole book of Romans. Trick question. Okay.

[14 : 43] So should they trade Luongo? No, they don't trade Luongo. Okay, guys. What have we got? What is the content of the gospel that Paul mediates that Paul brings to the Roman church?

Does anyone know? It's a book of Romans, isn't it? That's what it is. It's a whole book of Romans. That's the gospel that he mediates to the church.

Yes, I think a bunch of you would have said, well, it's Christ, we're sinful and Christ has died for us and through the grace of God we're able to be in a relationship with God because of that death.

Yes, that's true. That's the first three chapters of the book of Romans. What about the other 12? You see, what the book of Romans is about is for you guys in Rome you're saved by Christ but for you guys you've got to figure out how to get along with each other.

That's the transformation which will mean that you're actually saved, that it will actually show people that you've been transformed. So there's 12 chapters of Paul saying, you know, it doesn't really matter if you're descended from Abraham.

[15 : 55] That's chapter 4. Or in chapter 7, so you've got the law and you don't have the law. Well, who cares? We're all sinful, we're all saved. And in chapter 13 he says, don't judge by what people eat or what they don't eat.

In fact, you're going to have to compromise some of the things which you hold so precious for the sake of each other. That is the whole content of the gospel that Paul has brought to the Romans.

It starts with salvation and for them in particular it's going to mean this. Jewish Christians, Gentile Christians, you guys need to get along. Right? It's going to be great for you spiritually but it's also part of God's mission to the Roman world.

Now I think that's behind this kind of weird statement that Paul says here. Right? I myself am satisfied this is verse 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.

But on some points I have written to you very boldly and he does very boldly by way of reminder. I think what he's actually saying is you guys got it intellectually.

[17 : 01] Yeah, you're saved by Christ but you don't actually know what that means. So why are the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians fighting with each other? You've got it but you're not living it out. It's like you got perfect, you got A's on your region college exams and you go home and you're a complete idiot.

Right? That's what it's actually saying. You're not living your faith. And I think that's what he's actually talking about. Right? So, the whole gospel for the Roman church, the gospel in action is the whole book of Romans.

That's what he's given to them. What does it mean for us? You know what? I don't think it's a coincidence that God has given us chapters 14 and 15 in the book of Romans for the last few weeks.

We found out we're going to lose our church building what, three weeks ago and as the following Sunday we were reading in the book of Romans about how you know what? You're going to have to bear with each other and be in unity with one another and you're going to have to give up some things which you hold so precious for the sake of another person's faith.

Right? That's what you're going to have to do because that's what we're going to have to do. Right? So it's applying to us. It's absolutely applying. It's not coincidence. That's what God's given us. Right? I think it's amazing. This is a section we're doing right now in our church life.

[18 : 15] That's the first thing. Here's the second thing. You know, we're a Christian community. We're on mission. We bring the news about Jesus. Right? We bring the news about Jesus. That's what we do.

God shows people it's true but we bring the news about Jesus. We don't create it. We don't change it. We don't massage it. We don't edit it as much as we'd like to sometimes. We bring the news about Jesus and when I say that I mean the whole news about Jesus.

The whole Bible. That's what we bring. Right? Every person will have something in the Bible that's going to challenge them to be changing to make them more obedient to God. It's the whole gospel just like the Romans needed the book of Romans.

Right? We bring the whole gospel. And I'm saying that I'm saying that because the word of God is the word of life to humanity. And we're going to have to leave our building because we believe that the word of God is the word of life to humanity.

That's one of the reasons we're leaving. The diocese the issue that's presented itself is same-sex unions. Right? That we don't agree that that's what marriage is about and that's what families are about and the diocese agrees yes it is.

[19 : 21] That's acceptable in God's eyes and we're saying it isn't. That's a presenting factor but there's underlying factors which are much more serious than that. It's actually about changing the word of God. It's actually about changing the truth.

The message of salvation and life to all humanity. And I'm going to tell you something. If we don't have this we bring nothing to Vancouver. We bring absolutely nothing to this city unless we have the word of God.

So we're moving but listen part of the reason we're moving is not just because of us. It's because of our mission. It's because of the mission that God has given to us. That's one of the reasons we're moving.

Right? Because if we don't bring this to Vancouver we have nothing. We have nothing for them. And so we have to move. We have to move. Here's the second thing.

Paul had a plan and accepted that God might well have a better plan. Yeah. God had a plan and accepted that God might well have a better plan.

[20 : 21] What was Paul's plan? Well we've kind of seen it in Romans 15 haven't we? From Jerusalem to Illyricum and then beyond there to Rome and then to Spain.

What do we know about Paul? Well he spent time in jail and in a shipwreck and then back in jail I think and then another shipwreck and then he was on an island and then there was another shipwreck and I think he was back in jail again and as far as we know he probably never made it to Spain.

Right? Very strategic thinking. Right? What does he say in this letter? He says lest I build in someone else's foundation but as it is written I'm going to preach where other people haven't heard about Jesus.

That's his plan. That's his strategy. He's brilliant. Right? That's what he's going to do. We know that he goes to centers of learning like Ephesus in Athens because you create a church there and the message goes out to the whole Roman province around it.

Right? Completely strategic. At the same time he's in jail and he's out of jail and he's on an island and he's in a shipwreck and Paul being Paul he's like you know so he converts the jailer and he converts the other people on the boat and he converts the people on the shipwreck that's Paul.

[21 : 22] He's amazing. Right? So but that the mission goes on because God has a better plan for him. Right? The God that has a better plan for him. So on the one hand it's wise for us to think strategically about our mission here in Vancouver.

Right? To think strategically about so the gospel needs to go to what's over Dunbar. Right? And even Carisdale and even on the far reaches of the Vancouver empire to the barbarians in Marple.

We're actually going to send the gospel there and to what's over there Oak Ridge? Mount Pleasant even even even to Kitsilano.

Gospel must even go to Kitsilano. Right? That's the plan. And if you want to think strategically you have to think strategically about it. Here's my challenge for you tonight. When you go home when you go home tonight and you're at a stoplight or maybe you stop in your street look at the house beside you look at the house beside you and think how do we get Jesus into this house?

How do we get the message of Christ into this house? What do the kids do? What do the adults do? What do they do with their spare time? How do I get to know these people? How do I actually bring the truth of salvation of life to these people?

[22 : 34] Next week we're doing the vacation Bible school and a whole bunch of kids are coming which they're not Christians right? Which is great there's like 80 80 zillion of them or something I don't know there's a lot of them anyways and it's going to be nuts but it's going to be awesome right?

These kids that come that aren't Christians you know what? They're going to go home and they're going to talk to their parents about Christ so that the message goes into their homes right? I want you to think tonight look at the houses and think you know these people this is where we live how do we get the message of Christ into these homes?

That's what we're doing right? That's what we're doing however sometimes God has a better plan we're moving building and we have lots of plans that we could use this building for God's mission in Vancouver but you know what?

We had Christian lawyers who were confessing Christians we prayed a lot we sought wise counsel of Christian leaders we tried to not go to court we tried to mediate we tried to wait so the people would change and there came a point where we had to leave and we're going to have to leave here's a consolation you know what?

if we've done that we're moving so it must be how God has decided how we can better reach Vancouver now I know people are going to leave it's like leaving the family home and it's going to be incredibly hard for some people and we have to bear with each other but it's because God wants us to better seek and save the lost that must be the reason it's not what we would plan but it's what he's planned right?

[24 : 16] that's what's going to happen that's what's going to happen okay here's the last one Paul's view of mission patience patience who has lots of patience?

you guys are all waiting for me to finish that's how much patience you have still sunshine I want to get out stop preaching you know we can read this passage and I wouldn't think okay how long did Paul take to go from Jerusalem to Illyricum?

how long did it take him? so you know I've taken a boat kind of on that route and it took about a day you can fly in an hour so okay so buses didn't run so good back in the ancient world and you know would have been at donkeys and stuff so what would have taken him?

six months? I would have to work along the way maybe a year couple years 24 years 24 years Jerusalem to Illyricum 24 years that's a long time eh?

I'm impatient I want everything now I don't think I'm any different I think my kids are exactly the same I took my three kids to the Royal Bank in Dunbar last week to get them their own little bank accounts they've got no money in their bank accounts but we set up their bank accounts and they got their temporary temporary debit cards and as soon as one of my kids get it like the bank manager gives it to them he's like oh I'm going to go get some money out of the bank right now I'm like Jesse there's no money in your bank account we just opened it he's like well what good is this then?

[26 : 00] I got the card I want the money now like it's not enough to wait for a day so you can instantly go and get money out of the wall no he wants it right now instant communication email was fast not fast enough texting was fast not fast enough Twitter now we find out I don't care if you bought new shoes I really don't care don't Twitter me about your new shoes instant food instant entertainment there's this great great scene from the Simpsons right you know Mo Mo's bar Homer spends all his time in Mo's bar right so Mo gets this industrial sized deep fryer so he can deep fry a whole cow all at the same time right so he's super excited right Homer comes into the bar and Mo's like Homer Homer I got this this huge industrial sized deep fryer I can deep fry a whole cow in 30 seconds and Homer goes 30 seconds I want my deep fried cow now that's what we're like we want it all now missions aren't always instant sometimes you know what sometimes we're blessed enough to see people become Christians that's an amazing thing right it's an amazing thing amazing thing sometimes it's not like that sometimes missions take a long time if you talk to missionaries in third world countries maybe our friends are going to

Malawi to India they'll tell us it's actually long it's hard work it's a long haul sometimes and you have to be patient Paul's 24 years and Paul was an apostle right so it's not like he didn't have certain church planning skills right well you have been very patient with me so I thank you for that why don't we pray together to finish dear God we thank you that your mission to bring people to Christ always goes forward despite what is happening to us the mistakes we make the errors we make you're always consistent in bringing people to you give us courage to tell people the news about Jesus as individuals and as a church we thank you that it's you that change hearts to show them

Jesus we pray Lord that in your mercy you'll bring many people in Vancouver and British Columbia and Canada to know and to love Christ as their Lord and Savior we pray these things in your son's name amen God we pray... we pray let the son's name been I will... work for you to song andép■ Porto Father to hear from the first over to the two