

Part 3: The purpose of mission

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[0 : 00] If you'd like to turn, please, to Romans chapter 15.

As you know, we're making our way through the book, Original Mission, but in sermon series. And so, if any of you still have your books, then you'll know that this is one of the main readings out of part three. Also, crew is ahead of you by at least of morning, because they have done part three. In fact, if I'm feeling a little bit tired, I might just invite crew up to take over. Daniel's done a good job in teaching them, so I might just sit down and get them up here to do it.

You're looking really nervous. Those in crew are actually looking really nervous. I wouldn't do that to you tonight, but maybe next week. We'll see. So, Romans chapter 15, beginning at verse 14.

[1 : 14] Now hear God's word. 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 point, I have written to you very boldly, by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God.

Verse 16 of chapter 15.

Well, may God bless his word to us.

Always. And of course, this evening as well. We'll stand to sing, then we'll come back to that word in a moment. Well, as normal, in going through this series, there's more than one verse or verses that we're looking at, more than one part of the Bible that we concentrate on.

[3 : 09] However, what is expressed in these few words of Paul in Romans 15 really gets to the very heart of the purpose of mission. The reason for that is because in part one, we looked at the origin of mission, that there is a pre-full mission, and now there is a post-full mission.

And the post-full mission is really the mission of God in bringing Christ, and we proclaim the accomplishments of Christ. So now we're on to the very purpose of mission.

What is it for? And the truth remains that all direction for Christians come from where you know God is leading you. Your sense of direction comes from knowing where God is going with the world and with you in the world.

Christians are not lost. We may not see with our eyes the future that we're going to inherit, but as I have said, we see by hearing.

We know what the future will be, so we're not walking in the dark. We're able to see that future because the way that God has designed Christians to see is not with their eyes but with their ears.

[4 : 23] Faith comes by hearing, and we see what the mind can understand. So the more we understand about God's Word, the more we see what God is doing.

Like anything, when you have a conversation with someone and you say, I can't see what you're saying, what you're really saying is, I can't understand what you're saying. This idea of being able to perceive and to see is closely linked with the idea of hearing the Word of God in faith and being able to see it, though physically you're not seeing it.

So the purpose of mission, as Paul would have us understand it in the book of Romans, is to bring about the obedience of faith. Now this should make perfect sense to all of us, seeing that the mission began, that is the postful mission, because sin entered into the world through disobedience, the disobedience of one man.

And so God's mission is to bring man back to obedience. And Paul opens and closes his letter in Romans with this phrase, the obedience of faith.

And here in our reading, his role is before God is to bring the Gentiles, verse 18, to obedience by word and by deed.

[5 : 38] The point here is that the purpose of evangelism and discipleship is that men and women, boys and girls in the church and outside of the church would obey God initially in faith and

ongoinly in faith.

So the definition of the Christian life is the obedience of faith. A person who obeys God in faith. And we spoke a lot about faith, so I don't want to go back over that ground, but perhaps we could. Now the reason why this needs to happen is so that men and women, boys and girls, would then be able to glorify God. And you can only glorify God if you see God, if you recognize something about God.

The reason we sing the songs that we do, the hymns that we do, and the reason those hymns have the content that they do, that God is all-loving, that God is gracious, he's merciful, he's good, is because we see those things to be true about God, and then we praise him because we know them to be true.

We praise in that way because we're recognizing those truths about him. When you say something good about another person and you praise them on a human level, it is because you see that quality in them and you praise them for it.

[6 : 58] So the praise of God is no different. The qualities are, but the actual mechanism of praising God is very much the same. Now why does this happen?

Well, God is the true seeker. My very first message here, after being inducted as the minister, was Luke 19, and it was that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

The true seeker is not Zacchaeus. It is Jesus. Jesus makes it abundantly clear that while it looks like Zacchaeus is looking at Jesus, Jesus all the time is looking at Zacchaeus.

God is the true seeker, and he is seeking people who will worship him in spirit and in truth, John chapter 4, and he sends Jesus Christ into the world to bring about the obedience of faith so that people will worship God in spirit and in truth.

The obedience of faith includes worship. The obedience of faith includes the praise of God. It includes doing everything for the glory of God. Now the implication of this is that the ministry of the church has at its very center this act of redemption.

[8 : 14] Our ministry is redemptive. Not that we can redeem anyone, but we proclaim the message of Christ who does redeem men and women, boys and girls. The ultimate goal of serving God down here is redemption.

That people need to change. And the change that needs to happen is from death to life. It's from blindness to being able to see God.

Now we can't redeem, as I've said, but Christ does redeem. And we're proclaiming what Christ has done, and in doing so, men and women, boys and girls, they come to know Christ in that way. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Now the reason why this is crucial is because Christ is the priest who offers to God the perfect sacrifice so that that can actually happen. Paul here describes himself as a priest in the ministry of the gospel. Peter describes the church as a royal priesthood. And the reason why Peter and Paul are able to describe themselves in the church as in participating in this priestly service is because we're imitating Christ.

[9 : 32] Not that we can redeem anyone. Not that we can lay ourselves down as a sacrifice. But what we do by the service that we rendered, that is an acceptable offering to God.

As you go out and serve God in the world by telling people about Jesus, that's your offering to God. Paul even says that as these believers come to know the Lord Jesus Christ and are redeemed, he offers them to God as a holy offering.

So you can't get away from this central idea of offering, of obedience of faith, of Christ being the perfect priest and the perfect sacrifice, which we proclaim as we offer our service to God.

And the reason we do all of this, that the sole reason or the main reason, is to bring about the obedience of faith. People need to obey God.

Now they need to obey God for lots of different reasons, but they need to obey God because it's God we're talking about. God is God and God deserves to be worshipped.

[10 : 41] He deserves to be obeyed. He deserves to receive praise and glory. And this obedience of faith is both initial in evangelism that comes about and ongoing in discipleship.

And as Christians do the good works that they do, they do so in accordance with their obedience of faith. Everything is in accordance with that simple principle there.

So as Paul says, whatever you do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever it is, of course, consistent with Christ, but whatever it is that you do, do it in Christ.

Why? Because that's the obedience of faith. You know who you're serving. So what does this mean, this idea of obedience of faith?

Well, hopefully you've seen over the last couple of weeks that worship, at least the definition of worship, is obedience. Okay? Praise is to speak well of, but obedience is to obey God.

[11 : 44] Romans 12. That as our hearts have been changed by the gospel, as we reflect back on to the gospel, we're able to present ourselves as a living sacrifice to God obediently, as this is our act of worship.

It's an act of obedience to God. Now, when God created the first man and first woman, the important thing to recognize is that he created them with the freedom to obey.

That they had a unique position in that they were able not to sin. We don't have that position outside of Christ. When God created Adam, he created him able not to sin.

But because he had the freedom that he did, he was also able to sin. But the moment sin entered into the world through disobedience, people no longer had the freedom of not being able to sin.

All they could do now is sin. So the obedience of faith was lost. Through one man's disobedience, that obedience to God is then lost because of one man's sin.

[12 : 52] Now, sin is the new reality. Sin is something that everyone has to live with. And so God is going to address the problem. If the problem is disobedience, then what might the solution be?

Well, not surprisingly, the obedience of faith. In other words, what God brings us back to is what was lost at the beginning. And what is lost is actually to our detriment, not to God's in that sense. So all true obedience comes from faith. And without faith, it is impossible to please God. Now, what we need to recognize here is that God enables the Christian believer to then live the Christian life, which we looked at this morning.

God's grace is enabling grace. It makes us able to do things that we could not do without it. And that obedience is simply the fruit of faith.

I am now able to obey where I once was not able to obey. I have been brought to the obedience of faith in Christ by the accomplishment of Christ on the cross.

[14 : 02] Now, this is what follows. Those who obey God are those who are able to serve God. Okay? Those who obey God are those who are able to serve God.

The disobedient people don't serve God. And those who have the ability to obey do serve God. The question is now is, what do we do? We've been called to serve God, but what are we actually serving?

What is the actual purpose? And this is where Paul lays it out for us. He describes himself as being in the priestly service of the gospel.

He recognizes what God is doing in the world, and he recognizes that he is in the world to serve God. And this means that the method of everything that he does must conform to the identity of mission.

In other words, Paul can't go, well, I'm going to serve you in this way, Lord. It's nice to think that, Lord, I've got so much to contribute. And you have, but not in this area.

[15 : 11] The area of mission is God's domain. It's what God is doing and what God calls us into. And so what does Paul even consider himself as bringing the priestly ministry of the gospel?

Well, a priest is someone who takes something and offers it to God, but recognizes that what he offers to God has to be perfect. It has to be without blemish.

It has to be absolutely as good as good can be. And this is absolutely key. So Paul understands that as he goes out and preaches the gospel to sinners, something has to happen in order for those people to be given to God as a holy offering, without spot, without blemish, that's perfectly acceptable to God.

And what happens is conversion. So as Paul goes out and he proclaims the message of the gospel, and men and women, boys and girls become saved, he then takes those believers, as if it were, and offers them to God as a holy offering because they have been made holy through the work of Christ.

They are now being able to be offered to God as God's people because of what Christ has done. And Paul understands that the proclaimer of the gospel is a priest offering to God newly converted men and women, boys and girls.

[16 : 38] And the only reason they've been made righteous, of course, is 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21, the great exchange. Christ has given them his righteousness and taken their sin upon himself on

the cross.

They are now for holy. They are then able to be given to God as a holy offering that is acceptable to God. And that's what Paul is saying.

How does a person become acceptable to God? And the answer is only through the gospel. You're not acceptable to God in any other condition.

The only way you're acceptable to God is being made perfect through the work of God in Christ Jesus. And as you are, you are then offered to God as a holy offering which God keeps forever and ever.

So Paul now begins to be able to see, or we be able to see what Paul is saying, that this allows us to understand the motivation for mission.

[17 : 44] Now we understand the purpose of mission. God is seeking worshippers who will worship him in spirit and in truth. That God is seeking a people who are holy. He wants a people who are acceptable to him.

He wants a people who are obedient, have the obedience of faith. And the way that that will happen is through the gospel. Paul now understands the type of motivation that this creates.

And where the focus actually comes from. That God deserves to be worshipped. So I want you to think about this briefly if you can.

If God deserves to be worshipped, which he does, and God is the one seeking people who will worship him in spirit and in truth, and God brings about this change through the person of Jesus Christ, what does that do to people like you and me who tell others about Jesus?

Well, the first thing that it does is it refocuses their attention off the lost and onto God. And by focusing our attention on God, it's then redirected back onto the lost.

[18 : 53] And the reason it's that way around is so that we don't misunderstand the center of God's mission. Paul says this, that whether you eat or drink, you're to do it all to the glory of God.

And therefore, the gospel must lead to that end. The end of the gospel must be for the glory of God. Okay? What's in focus here is God.

Well, what about people? Well, we'll get to people. But I want you to understand that the very motivation for gospel proclamation is God and not lost sinners. And the reason why that's so crucial is because when you get that, you don't give up.

When you understand that, it doesn't matter who you speak to. No one person is preferred over the other. When a person glorifies God, they recognize his greatness.

They recognize who God is. They recognize and give praise to who God is. And since God is seeking people who will do that, and he changes those people through the gospel, we understand that the very center of our mission comes down to God.

[20 : 07] This is how it works. Since God deserves to be worshipped by all people, okay? And we understand that the reason we're going out into the world is because of what God deserves.

Okay? The reason I proclaim the gospel is because God deserves to be worshipped by you. The reason I proclaim the gospel is because God deserves for all men and women to obey him in faith. My motivation for proclaiming the gospel comes from God. Well, what does this mean? It means that I'm not drawn to any particular type of person. I can never be drawn to a particular type of person because my motivation for them being saved is not found in them, but found in God.

I'm not drawn to one person more than I am than the other, thinking they'd make a good Christian. I mean, what kind of thought is that anyway? It's certainly not one that comes from Scripture.

The reason they would make a good Christian is because, like anyone would make a good Christian, because they're able then to worship God in spirit and in truth. So I'm not drawn to one person over here more than I am the other person because my focus is not on people, it's on what God deserves.

[21 : 25] And God deserves to be worshipped by all people. So now I understand why the gospel is to go out to the whole world. Because God deserves to be worshipped by all people in the whole world.

So I'm not to think that this person doesn't deserve to hear it, okay, because they're a terrible sinner, because my focus is not on what they deserve or don't deserve, but rather on what God deserves, and that is worship from them.

So when I understand that God is the very center of mission, and my focus is not on people, my focus is actually on people as it should be. Okay?

Because now I don't take who they are into consideration. I'm able to listen to someone who thinks that I am crazy to believe what I believe, and that I shouldn't be listened to by anyone, and I'm able to look at that person and still believe, in light of that, that God deserves to be worshipped even by him.

Okay? That's the focus. But the moment we take our focus of God and focus on people, it's tempting to think, all right, well, you can just go to... Right?

[22 : 37] Because the moment we start focusing on people, we then start noticing differences. We then start noticing that, well, he's easy to speak to, she's easy to speak to, but that's just full of rejection.

And the reason we don't get caught up in that is because that's not our focus. The reason for proclaiming the gospel is because the purpose is to bring about the obedience of faith.

The purpose is because God deserves to be worshipped by men and women, boys and girls, everywhere. No one person is more important than anybody else.

And people's rejection of the gospel doesn't interrupt the purpose of mission. It just doesn't get in the way. God looks out onto the world, and it doesn't matter what kind of person they are, according to God, God is deserved to be worshipped by all of them.

So the reason the gospel spreads throughout the whole world is because of what God deserves, not because of what the people in the world actually deserve or don't deserve.

[23 : 39] And that's what keeps the church going, is because their focus is on a holy God who deserves to be worshipped. And, might I add, if I've not said already, which I have, who is actively seeking and saving the lost through his church, as he did through the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is God who's going out into the world through us, seeking and saving the lost. So where do we come in? Well, now that we've cleared up what the obedience of faith is to bring us back to where God would have us, and our motivation for doing it, God himself, what do we actually do?

Well, obviously, we proclaim the saving news of Jesus Christ. Paul's attention is to draw people's attention to God.

What Paul is attentive to is how can he get your attention on God and of yourself? How can he get you to think about the things of God?

And the way that he does it is, as Peter says, by going out and doing your good deeds before people who will say evil things about you. But on the day of visitation, they will bow down and glorify God.

[25 : 00] Okay? God, in the end, will demonstrate that time and truth go hand in hand, that given enough time, the truth will always be revealed to men and women, boys and girls, everywhere.

And so, as unbelievers repent and believe, they actually come to see the same things in God that we see. They actually come to glorify the same God that we glorify in the same way.

Because what they see is what we have always seen, and the only reason we have seen it is because we have actually come to know the truth. You see, as the church focuses on what God deserves, it doesn't lose its motivation for telling people about God.

But the moment the church loses its focus, that is, not centering on God and start centering on people, well, some people are just hard work. Okay?

I'm going to give it a break today. I just don't think I can face that person this week. Okay? But when it comes to actually what God deserves, okay, we no longer think about the person.

[26 : 04] We no longer even think about what they're thinking about us. Because it's not about them, and it's not about us. It's about what God deserves. God deserves to be worshipped by them.

And that's what keeps us proclaiming the message. Because God deserves to be worshipped. So all Christian ministry must have as its identity this redemptive work.

At the very heart of everything that we do, it must be the identity of redemption. And so the simple question that follows is this.

Think about the ministries you're involved in. And ask yourself the question, at the heart of it, is there redemption? Are you motivated as you look at the people you serve in the ministries that you do, that when you look at them, do you think that God deserves to be worshipped by them?

As you do, your attitude and your conversation with them will begin to change. But only as you focus on God and no longer on them.

[27 : 16] Because as you focus on God, you will begin to focus on them in a different kind of way. That's the purpose of our purpose in serving God.

God deserves to be worshipped. And God is seeking people who will worship him in spirit and in truth.

We ought not to forget the center. We ought not to move away from the center. Because by moving away from the center, not only do we lose our focus on God, but we lose our focus on what people really need.

So, both are affected. Okay? And that's the problem. So, here's the exhortation. A gentle one, but an exhortation nonetheless as we close.

I believe, as Scripture teaches, it seems, that if we don't understand God's purpose in mission, then Christians will find something else to do.

[28 : 20] And quite frequently, that's exactly what they do. Okay? I'll put it again, that if Christians don't understand the purpose of God in mission, the centrality of God in mission, then Christians will find something else to do, and often they do.

Their involvement within ministries, though very, very helpful and very, very beneficial to the church, seems to lose its redemptive edge. It seems to be there somewhere, but no one quite knows where they left it.

So, we're to do all things, okay, in word and deed. Of course, we're to do all things in the name of Christ. But when you read Colossians 3, you're to do all things in the name of Christ as long as Christ is ruling in your heart, as long as the word of God is dwelling richly in you.

When that's happening, of course, do everything in the name of Christ. Because when that's happening, you will do everything in the name of Christ. When Christ rules in your heart and the word of God dwells richly in you.

When you seek the things that are above, you will do things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ quite naturally. When you set your things on the, when you set your mind on the things above and not on the things below, you will naturally do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ because your focus is where it ought to be.

[29 : 45] And so, your prayer is what follows. So, yeah, whatever you do, do it in the name of Christ. But what you do ought to be guided by Christ ruling in your heart, by the word of God dwelling richly in you.

People in the world will come to see who God is one day. Our job is for them to see God before it's too late. Our job is to teach them the gospel so that they may come to see and know the Lord Jesus Christ for themselves right here and right now.

And the reason why God is seeking worshippers who will worship him in spirit and in truth is not because God is in need of it as we have said frequently, but it is because we're in need of it because we become like what we worship.

The reason why worship is so central to gospel proclamation, the reason why this idea of worship is central in the gospels that God is seeking a people who will worship him in spirit and in truth is not because he needs it but it's because you need it because we become like what we worship.

And no person can bring about the obedience of faith without the new birth. This brings us back to the very necessity of the new birth. The only way you can obey God is through the new birth.

[31 : 08] The only way you can serve God is through the new birth. And so we proclaim Christ so that people can be born again, so that they can experience the new birth, the obedience of faith and communion with God.

So remember, the purpose of mission is redemptive. The motivation for mission is what God deserves. And the very energy for mission to go out and do it is not lost because their focus is fixed on Christ.

So as we look at people, we really ought to be looking at God. As we look at them, we look at them through God. We look at them with what God deserves from them.

And we look at ourselves thinking, what does God deserve from me? And the obedience of faith is both that initial faith which brings about worship and the ongoing faith which is why we're here tonight worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

Amen.