

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 15:19-22

Recap of Last Time: 1. Paul has returned to his original thoughts at the beginning of his epistle: His desire to preach at Rome and the reasons he has been delayed for so long. 2. Paul has outlined his Priestly ministry to the Jews and his calling to lead the Gentiles to follow God.

- **“From Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum...”**

Verse 19: “... By the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.”

The geography in Paul's statement, “*from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum...*” This is Paul's shortest summary of nearly ten years of very strenuous apostolic ministry, including three missionary journeys.

Paul's overall journey began in Jerusalem and swung northwesterly all the way to Illyricum (next to Italy). The phrase, “all the way around” Paul uses a Greek word that notes travelling “in a circuit”.

On a first century map, the arc begins in Jerusalem, goes north to Syrian Antioch, then further north and west through the provinces of Asia Minor, and across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia. From there it leads south to Achaia, then east across the Aegean Sea again, and via Ephesus back to Antioch and Jerusalem.

Paul says he had evangelized Illyricum. Today, we would identify this area with to Albania and the southern part of former Yugoslavia. Luke doesn't narrate this ministry in the book of Acts, but it may well have occurred during the two-year period between Paul's leaving Ephesus and embarking for Jerusalem.

While Paul was in Macedonia, he may have walked west along the Ignatian Way from Thessalonica, at least to the borders of Illyricum.

The phrase Paul uses in saying he had “fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ” there is probably better understood as he had “completed preaching the gospel of Christ there.

Paul is not stating that he had been to every city from Jerusalem to Illyricum. As a master planner and strategist, when Paul came to an area, he would establish a headquarters and plant church. Before he left, he would establish church leadership, choosing those he felt were mature enough to carry on the work.

In missions, we call this the “indigenous people” approach. A missionary goes to a region and preaches the gospel. Church leaders are eventually chosen from among those who were saved early on in the ministry and had developed spiritually.

- **Paul’s Prime Directive**

Throughout Paul’s arduous ten-year ministry, what was the number one thing he felt compelled to accomplish? Look at verse 20:

“It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation.”

The Greek allows for this statement to read as, “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not “named” or “honored”.

Unlike many other apostles who settled down in specific geographic locations and gave leadership to the fledgling Church, Paul says his “ambition” was to take the gospel where Christ’s Name had yet to be known or honored.

Only once in Paul’s ministry did he settle in a geographic area for an

extended time. This was in Ephesus. See: Acts 19:1; 8-12.

As some scholars point out, Paul's years in Ephesus were perhaps his most fruitful times in ministry. Many feel the Ephesus model was meant to show what Christian Missions should look like.

Paul used this opportunity to evangelize the Hellenistic populations, establish house churches, and raise up church leaders to continue the work of the ministry.

Because of Paul's time at Ephesus, Christianity spread throughout Asia Minor. Ephesus became a strong epicenter for Christian missions which lasted well into the early middle ages.

Paul understood that different apostles and disciples had varying duties and fields of service. See: Romans 12:4-8

Paul understood that apostolic ministry could have different dimensions. Men like Peter or John might well spend the bulk of their ministry in one location.

As Paul saw it, the Holy Spirit empowered different disciples with varying gifts and focus. As such, some apostles were to give dedicated oversight to specific regions. Their stay in these areas might involve years.

Paul's calling as an apostle to the Gentiles was to break new ground and then leave the ministry and administration of the churches to those he deemed qualified for the task -- especially to local, residential presbyters.

Paul uses two metaphors to describe his task that of the other apostles. He illustrated this division of labor with terms from agriculture and architecture.

In 1 Corinthians 3:6-9 he notes, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters

is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

Paul's Prime Directive was to evangelize the Gentiles, establish churches, and move on. As Luke chronicles Paul's missionary this pattern becomes obvious.

Paul uses both a positive and negative statement to express this Prime Directive: The Positive Statement is that he is called to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. The Negative Statement is that he does not want to "build on someone else's foundation".

The Positive Statement:

Apostolic missionary work, or church planting is, in fact, preaching where Christ has not yet been made known. That's what a modern missionary does. He or she takes the gospel where it is not established.

Today, the greatest unreached population in the world resides in what we call the 10-40 window - the rectangular area of North Africa, the Middle East and Asia approximately between 10 degrees north and 40 degrees north latitude.

Some 5 billion individuals live in the 10/40 window. This includes 8,945 distinct people groups. 69% of these people groups are considered unreached and have a population of 3.16 billion.

The 10/40 Window is home to some of the largest unreached people groups in the world such as the Shaikh, Yadava, Turks, Moroccan Arabs, Pashtun, Jat and Burmese.

Where would Paul be focusing his attention on if he were a 21st century apostolic missionary? My guess is he would be evangelizing the 10/40 window, because this is greatest population of Gentiles who do not know or honor the Name of Christ.

The Negative Statement:

Paul tells the Romans, "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation."

That last statement expresses the negative equation: Paul does not want to build on someone else's foundation. Let's be specific about what he means. He wants to enter unreached locations and spread the gospel where others have not been.

Doesn't someone else have to build on the previously laid foundations of the gospel? Certainly. That responsibility falls to pastors, teachers, - and to some degree - evangelists.

Paul states this in Ephesians 4:11-13:

"Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

"Christ himself gave apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers." The authority and the calling are Christ's decisions. "They are to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

That is how Paul's apostolic ministry operated: He planted churches, raised up local leadership, and moved on the next field. It was the newly appointed leaders' task to equip the body of Christ for ministry, just as they had been equipped by Paul.

In validating his ministry, Paul uses another snippet of scripture when he cites Isaiah 52:15 from the Greek Old Testament. The original context of the verse is the Messiah's Ministry.

Here is one translation of that verse:

“Thus shall many nations wonder at him; and kings shall keep their mouths shut: for they to whom no report was brought concerning him, shall see; and they who have not heard, shall consider.”

We get the impression that Paul saw Isaiah 52:15 as one of his major life-verses. It certainly explains what he calls his “ambition” or goal to reach the Gentiles without building on another apostle’s foundational work.

As Paul concludes, he tells the Romans that his “Prime Directive” to take the gospel to the unreached areas of his world is the reason he is very late in coming to them. He writes: “This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.”

Paul waits until the closing paragraphs of his epistle to tell the Romans that his primary focus on missions has been the true reason for his delay in going to Rome.

Now he plans to visit them on his way to the mission fields of Spain.