

SINCE YOU ASPIRE TO PREACH THE GOSPEL...
ROMANS 15:20-21

Will and Natalyn, I don't remember the first time you mentioned your interest in missions to me. But I do remember that it has been a repeated conversation between us. You have always been interested in missions and taking the gospel to those who do not know Christ. You have prayed. You have planned. You have already sacrificed (job, resources, house, training at Radius, etc.). You have already experienced some of the troubles of missions and ministry (three significant health issues while at Radius among them). And you have experienced some of the blessings that come from entrusting yourself to the Lord.

And tomorrow you leave for SE Asia.

What shall we say on this day? You already know what we believe about the gospel and ministry — you've heard hundreds of sermons here. You've heard thousands of sermons in your lives, you've read hundreds of books, you have attended Bible school, and you have been discipled by many, starting with the excellent job done by your parents for the first two decades of your lives. We aren't going to tell you anything new today. But I do want to remind you of three essentials to pack as you leave. They won't take much room in your luggage, but they will fill your heart to overflowing. These are truths that are familiar to you, but as you get on that airplane and land in SE Asia, we want these truths sounding in your ears and resonating in your hearts.

To guide us, I want to take us back to one of the first great missionary documents — the book of Romans. At the end of that great letter, Paul reveals that he is going to Spain and he wants the Roman church to serve as his "sending church" and base of operations. The majority of the book reveals his theology and demonstrates why Paul is a worthy candidate to be sent as a missionary. Starting in 15:14, Paul unfolds his ministry and missions philosophy. From that section I want to focus on vv. 20-21 and think with you about three essentials as you go. You know and are committed to them. Don't forget them. **Since you**, like the apostle Paul, aspire to preach the gospel where Christ is not yet known, **remember these three priorities...**

- 1. Remember the GOSPEL**
- 2. Remember the LOST**
- 3. Remember CHRIST**

1. Remember the GOSPEL (v. 20a)

- What's your ambition? What do you want most of all? For what do you live?
 - ✓ We tend to think of ambition as a negative trait — e.g., "he's an ambitious person" is often negative.
 - ✓ But Paul does have an ambition — to preach the gospel. His aim is to be a lowly gospel pioneer.

- ✓ Paul wants to be a trailblazer for the gospel, no matter how much it costs him. He is willing to live sacrificially for the sake of Israel's salvation (10:1; 9:1-4). And for the sake of the Gentiles (vv. 9, 16).
- ✓ He's consumed by this passion to make the gospel known. He is restless and relentless.
- ✓ You are following in that same tradition; no matter the obstacles, you keep moving towards the goal.
- We do also need to ask, "What is the gospel Paul wants to make known?" While there is much confusion about that simple question, there is a simple answer. Consider Paul's own words from this letter: 1:1-6.
 - ✓ The gospel and salvation from sin has been God's plan throughout Scripture and the prophets (v. 2).
 - ✓ The gospel is founded on the person of Christ (vv. 3-4a) — eternal Son of God and true man
 - ✓ The gospel is the message that Christ, who did not sin died for sin and was resurrected for life (4b)
 - ✓ The gospel is a gift of grace (v. 5) and it is received by faith (v. 17).
 - ✓ The gospel is given to transform lives and produce obedience (v. 5b) — and it is for all people so that God's name will be worshipped. The gospel is for us, but it's about God's glory.
 - ✓ If you don't yet believe the truth that Christ died for your sins, we urge you to believe today...
- This gospel is what Paul and you and every believer is obligated to preach. There is no hope without this message. This gospel is the only reality that will change lives — and it is sufficient for everyone everywhere (1:16). The only life and the only hope is to believe in this gospel by faith alone (1:17).
 - ✓ In the ministry of the OT prophets, the ministry of Christ, the ministry of the apostles, the ministry of the early church, the ministry of the Reformers, the ministry of GBC in Granbury, and your ministry in SE Asia, there always has been and always will be attempts to find another way.
 - ✓ There is no other way to care for the souls of people.
 - ✓ Care of souls always begins with and is founded on the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - ✓ You will be tempted by a variety of other options — social gospel and caring for bodily needs, social justice and correcting cultural inequities, compromised gospel and more "effective" and speedy tools to building churches. They are always present. You will be tempted to be weary from their attacks.
 - ✓ But there is only one foundation for building effective churches and it begins with the true explanation of the one and only gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - ✓ *Remember the gospel.* You are going to SE Asia to learn languages and start a business so you can go to an unreached people group and tell them the good news, the only news of salvation. When you are working, don't forget the gospel. That's why we are sending you.

2. Remember the LOST (v. 20b)

- There is a mandate for every believer to communicate the gospel to those who do not believe. That's the great commission and it's the reason for our commitment to both missions and evangelism.
- But many places have faithful churches and faithful people to communicate the gospel. While it is good to be in those places (like Granbury and FW and the US — and Geneva), there are still some places

where the gospel has not reached (like SE Asia) — places where they have no Bible and they have no understanding of the name of Jesus. That's where Paul wanted to go. *And where you want to go.*

- ✓ Paul did not want to go **where Christ was already named**.
 - He didn't want to go where there churches had already been established; he didn't want to **build on the foundation of another man's** work. He wanted to lay the foundation of churches; and since he had already done that throughout Asia Minor (v. 19b), he wanted to go elsewhere.
 - This was Paul's personal vision and desire; he was not saying this was the task for everyone.
 - But it does need to be the task for some — because how will they know, hear, and believe, without someone going to them? Cf. 10:14-15.
- ✓ He wanted to go elsewhere because of the lostness of being lost. There was an urgency in him for those who were lost to hear and believe the gospel.
- ✓ Eternity is long, Hell is horrific, and people we know are going there. In Paul's case, people he didn't know (yet) were going there, and *that* reality compelled him to go with the gospel to them.

- W&N — never lose a sense of the urgency of the gospel and the lostness of the lost.
 - ✓ You will get to experience many unique things which will be a blessing — different foods, and a rich new culture, and beautiful scenery, and new relationships.
 - ✓ And you will still have your fundamental responsibilities as husband/wife, parent, child, friend...
 - ✓ Don't forget why you are there. You are there to learn a language and cultivate relationships and learn a culture and start a business — all for the sole purpose of preaching the gospel so those who are lost will be found by the Savior Jesus.
 - ✓ The first part of ministry is about recognizing that people are lost (cf. Lk. 15 parables; Lk. 19:10).
 - ✓ Remember to cultivate grief over their lostness — Christ and so many missionaries have done:
 - John Knox: "Give me Scotland or I die."
 - C. T. Studd: "Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."
 - Charles Spurgeon: "If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for."
- I am grateful that you have this longing. Keep that longing. Remember the lost. But even more...

3. Remember **CHRIST** (vv. 20b-21)

- This principle is at the heart of this section; notice how many times Paul directly mentions **Christ** (vv. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 [Him], 29, 30). Paul, who was captivated by Christ from the moment of His conversion, is driven by his love for Christ to go to the nations.

- And this priority of remembering Christ is prominent in his other letters as well; consider just one more example (2 Tim. 2:8-9): “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned.”
- “Preach any Christ but a crucified Christ and you will not reach men for long.” (Torrey)
- Paul was committed to go to the nations for the sake of the gospel and the sake of the lost. But mostly he went because of Christ. He went for the sake of the name of Christ (3 Jn. 7) and His Father in Heaven:
 - ✓ “God be gracious to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations.” (Ps. 67:1-2)
 - ✓ “Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples. For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised He is to be feared above all gods.” (Psa. 96:3-4)
 - ✓ “But I acted for the sake of My name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made Myself known to them by bringing them out of the land of Egypt.” (Ezek. 20:9)
 - ✓ “So then, whether we eat or drink [or go to SE Asia for gospel purposes] or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). It’s always all about Him.
 - ✓ It’s always about the privilege of serving Him. Never get over the fact that you were a sinner who hated God and Christ and now He has saved you and is using you to communicate that message of Him to others so that they might believe and learn to be obedient.
- When you are weary (and you will be), and tempted to loneliness, and uncertain what to do next, and struggling with relationships with team members (and spouses and children), remember Christ.
- You aren’t going for adventure, or even ultimately for lost people; you are going for Him and His glory.
 - ✓ This will strengthen your own soul — it’s a reminder of the amazing gift God has given you in sending you to a distant land (2 Cor. 4:1-4, 7ff). Not losing heart and enduring in hard circumstances are dependent on you remembering the gospel for yourselves.
 - ✓ And it will enable you to sacrifice yourselves and your lives as you remember the end of your service of Him (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

CONCLUSION: That’s it. Your bags should be full now:

- ✓ Remember the gospel.
- ✓ Remember the lost.
- ✓ Remember Christ.

We could say more. (I have at least five more things to remember from the rest of the chapter). But this is enough for now. Remember and act on these priorities, and you will be faithful servants of Christ.

BENEDICTION: Romans 16:25-27