Living For What Matters Forever
Series: Righteousness Revealed
Romans 15:14-33
Chadron Bible Church

You might recall this story from a couple of months ago but…
On a treacherous seacoast prone to shipwrecks, a small, humble life-saving station dedicated itself to rescuing the drowning. Initially, the station's members were selfless and devoted, risking their lives to save others. As their success grew, the station attracted more members, resources, and prestige. Over time, its focus shifted from saving lives to that of a country club. Rescue missions were delegated to hired crews, and the survivors, often diverse and needy, became an inconvenience.

Eventually, many members chose to abandon the original mission entirely, prioritizing comfort and exclusivity. Dissatisfied realists would establish new life-saving stations, only for the cycle to repeat. Today, the coast is lined with luxurious meeting places, but the true mission of saving lives has largely been abandoned, and countless people still drown.

Danger of Drifting
Just like the life-saving station, every church is in **danger of getting** sidetracked from their mission. To become self-focused, inward focused, arguing over silly things, and forget the mission of making disciples. Being the church is more than just going to church and hearing a message. It's learning to become like Jesus and then helping others do the same.

Dramatic Shift
If you've been tracking with us the past couple of weeks we've been talking about how churches can lose sight of what matters and start arguing over non-essentials. That's what we've been discussing the past couple of weeks in Romans 14 & 15. But today is going to be a **dramatic shift** of focus because we go from Paul instructing a church about matters of eating and drinking, to his **ministry plans** to **continue reaching the lost** and **advancing the gospel** where it has never been heard. And it's a **stark reminder of the kind of church we want to be.** While some churches seem bent to become **self-focused, debating** over pews or chairs, pianos or keyboards, hymns or modern songs, blue or red carpet, **some churches are living on mission, making disciples, supporting missions, and maybe even planting more churches.** They're active in their community and in the world. Reaching out. They're promoting gospel progress. This is the seventh mark of a transformed life. What a transformed life looks like (12:1-2):

1. Harbor **humility** in God's household. (12:3-8)
2. **Love** others as Jesus loves us. (12:9-21)
4. Clothe ourselves with **Christlike conduct**. (13:1-14)
5. Give **grace** in the grays. (14:1-23)
6. Prioritize the **big picture** over personal preferences. (15:1-13)
7. Promote **gospel progress**. (Romans 15:14-33)

Romans 1-11

If the truths of Romans 1-11 are really true, that every man is a sinner and without believing in Jesus is condemned, bound to be separated from God forever—if we believe that, we are going to be **serious about helping others come to know Him as well**. Serious about evangelism, making disciples, planting churches.

3 Closings
Before we dive into the text, we should note that we are officially entering the closing of the letter. This letter has like **3 closings**. 3 **Benedictions**. It's like Paul just **couldn't stop writing a little bit more.** And now… amen. And now… amen. Kind of like the bad preacher who makes people sigh by saying, **"And in conclusion" 3 times.** But you have to remember he wasn't typing his letters on a **laptop**. He didn't have a **backspace** button.

15 &16
In chapter 16, Paul will focus on **personal greetings and Christian coworkers**. But the rest of chapter 15 deals with **Paul's ministry details**. His **record** and **future**.

Looking back: Paul's Past Labors. (15:14-21)

14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. 15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Commendation & Calling
So Paul begins with a **commendation** and his **calling** from Jesus to be an **apostle to the Gentiles**. If you were with us through Acts, you heard Paul share that **testimony** more than once. Jesus just **blindsided** him on the way to Damascus, and told him that he would be an **instrument** of Jesus to make His gospel known among the Gentiles. And that's what Paul had dedicated his life too. He was an **apostolic church planter**.

Lacking Confidence?
However, he didn't **found** this church. This church was founded **organically** as the Gospel spread. But because he wasn't the founder, some of the believers who listened to this **long and lengthy letter** might have thought that Paul thought they were **ignorant** or that he lacked **confidence** in them. They might've thought, "Oh, Paul thinks we're spiritually immature and that's why he writes this long letter to us." But it isn't because they're so **immature**.

Marks of Maturity
In fact, he says I'm persuaded you are **full of goodness**. You have a good-willed heart. You're **generous, kind, you mean well**. You also have **knowledge**, a comprehensive understanding of the Christian faith and to the degree that you can **admonish** one another—instruct each other. They have marks of **maturity**—morally, intellectually, and functionally. You have everything

you need to be a healthy, functioning church. Their **competent** to fulfill their calling. But his letter is a bold **reminder** to **stick to it.** To do what they know Jesus is calling them too.

Reminders
If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you know that you don't need a preacher to bring new truths to you. You just need someone to **remind** you of the truth. We need the same **old truths** presented to us time and again. We need to hear the **gospel** over and over. There's a sense in which you do need your **pastor** to be a **broken record**. That was Paul. Writing the same things to churches, with a slightly different angle for their unique set of circumstances.

Priest
He referred to himself as a "**priest**" offer up the **Gentiles** as a **sanctified** offering to God. When Paul talks about being a **priest** here, he's not referring to himself as a Catholic or Lutheran priest or something like that. It's a **metaphor** taken from the OT. A priest was a **mediary** between God and men. Paul was a chosen mediary between God and the Gentiles. And according to other NT writings, **every believer** can think of themselves as a priest offering up **spiritual sacrifices**.

Participants
We've talked about that before, but the fact is, we're **participants** in the gospel story just like Paul. He had a **unique, foundational role** in God's story, no doubt; but so does **each of us**. He uniquely gifts and calls us into His service as well. He continues in verse 17 with his success.

17 Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. 18 For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, 19 in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit;

Grace of Apostolic Authority
So here Paul just clarifies the "**grace**" that was given him as an apostle. God's grace is multifaceted. Grace upon grace. The grace here is the **apostolic authority** given him. This authority was **evident by the supernatural signs and wonders** he could perform in the power of the Spirit that helped people take notice. Jesus' miracles and the apostles' miracles, weren't so much ends in themselves as they were supports for the message. **The miracles supported the message**. By word (message) and deed (miracles). The deeds enforce the word.

Radical Shift: OC to NC
You have to think, if you're a Jew and you've been living under the Law for hundreds of years, it's going to take **something radical** to **convince** you that God's **program was changing**. He was moving from the **OC to the NC**? You're going to need some proof. Well, just like there was an abundance of miracles at the **inauguration** of the OC, the Exodus and wilderness miracles, Mt Sinai, so there was with the inauguration of the NC. It came with **power** through Jesus and the apostles to get the Church off the ground quickly. The most important being the resurrection.

Boast
Paul knew that these **miracles** and his **effectiveness** didn't belong to Him but to Christ. He **boasted** in God's grace, gave credit for what had happed to Jesus. We ought to do the same. It's what I'm doing as I look back on my tenure here. I'm an ordinary farm kid. My greatest dread in school was speech class. I'm not that quick-witted, not that wise. I have blind spots and immature spots like anybody. But God has graced this work. Anything accomplished we can give God the credit for it. For Paul, though, **the job's not finished**…

so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. 20 And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation; 21 but as it is written, "They who had no news of Him shall see, And they who have not heard shall understand."

Go West
So with his apostolic calling, Paul planted churches **throughout the eastern Mediterranean**. But instead of retiring, he turns his **gaze westward**. He wants to keep advancing the gospel among the Gentiles come to Christ. Keep going places where no one has gone!

Servant Song
In **verse 21**, Paul quotes one of the **Messianic Servant Songs of Isaiah** that talk about Christ and how His sacrifice will bring the Gentiles into God's family. The context of that Isaiah quote talks about the Messiah **sprinkling many nations** (sanctifying them, making them clean). So we could say Paul **found encouragement** from the OT for his mission. But I think we could go another step and amplify that a bit. Paul is God's **key man to fulfill that prophecy**. He's the main guy chosen to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

Participate: Pray Give Go
But again, let's not stop there. There are still places the gospel isn't known. People who haven't heard. When we take the gospel to them—when we **pray, give, and go**—we **participate** in that. We're part of this ongoing story.

What's Next
Paul's comment sets the stage for **what's next** for Paul.

Looking ahead: Paul's <u>future</u> labors. (15:22-29)

*22 For this reason I have often been prevented from coming to you; 23 but now, with **no further place for me in these regions**, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you 24 whenever I go to **Spain**—for I hope to see you in **passing**, and to be **helped** on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while— 25 but now, I am going to **Jerusalem serving the saints**. 26 For **Macedonia and Achaia** have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their **spiritual** things, they are indebted to minister to them also in **material** things. 28 Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my*

seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. 29 I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Corinth to Spain
Okay, so, when Paul writes this, he's in **Corinth [see map]**. His **intention** is to go to Spain. Spain was as far west as you could go in the empire at the time. He wanted to go there. On the way, he planned to stop at **Rome** to preach the gospel and to receive further support to go to **Spain**. For years he dreamt of going to Rome. But, before he goes West, he has some **unfinished business to take care of**.

Persecution & Famine
The **church in Jerusalem** is mainly **Jewish** and they are undergoing **persecution** for their faith. They're also experiencing a **famine**. So as we read elsewhere in his letters, some of the Gentile churches in Greece (Macedonia and Achaia), heard about this and of their own **free will** decided, "Hey, let's do something to help them out. We've been so blessed by the Jewish people and their Messiah and Scriptures and covenants… let's return the favor. They've blessed us **spiritually**. Let's bless them **materially**."

Jewish Support
This is such a **great biblical principle** and one that drives our own church to support Jewish ministry like **Friends of Israel**. Jewish people need to sense the love and appreciation we have for them.

Looking Up: Paul's request for <u>support</u>. (15:30–33)

*30 Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to **strive** together with me in your **prayers** to God for me, 31 that I may be **<u>rescued</u>** from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my **<u>service</u>** for Jerusalem may prove **acceptable** to the saints; 32 so that I may **<u>come to you</u> in joy by the will of God** and find refreshing rest in your company. 33 Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

Prayer
Paul asks them not just to pray, but to **strive** with him in his prayers. To **wrestle** with God in prayer. And for two things:

1. **<u>For safety</u>:** because he knows what a dangerous trip it is. Paul can't just hop on a plane and go back to Jerusalem real quick to drop off this collection of money. He's got to take a **treacherous ship** over the ocean. He's carrying this love offering and has to put up with **robbers and thieves**. As soon as he arrives, even before he arrives, unbelieving Jews and Judaizers are going to try to take his life. Knowing this is ahead may have been what **prompted him to write** such a detailed theological letter for the churches such as Romans. He knew he **might not make it** through this trip to Jerusalem.

   By the will of God.
   His prayers were **answered** later by the way but not the way he expected. It's actually the **Roman <u>army</u>** and his **Roman <u>citizenship</u>** that saves him from the Jews and he spends **2**

years in prison in **Caesarea** and finally after Jesus appears to him in his cell, he appeals to Caesar and the **government pays his way to Rome**. But God makes sure he shipwrecks on Malta on the way there to take the gospel there too. Sometimes God answers our prayer but not in the way we are expecting. Paul gets that. That's why he says, **"by the will of God"**. It's a reminder to his readers that **all his plans are contingent upon <u>God's will</u>.**

2. **<u>For acceptable service</u> to the Jewish believers:** that they'll accept this gift from the Gentiles. What I love about this is how serious Paul is about the **unity** of the churches. He is willing to **cease gospel advancement on the frontiers** for a time so that he can promote unity in the churches. So as one man said, "This isn't just about the money. This is about the Gentiles saying that they love their Jewish brothers and sisters." Paul wants to deliver this gift himself so that he will make sure that this gift is clearly understood.

CONCLUSION: What a difference!
AGAIN, what a dramatic difference from the things we've been discussing the last two weeks! While some Christians in Rome were caught up in **arguing over non-essentials** (Rom. 14:1-15:13). What to eat or drink. What color the carpet is. How long the church services should go. Pews or chairs. But here's Paul, **risking his life to reach the <u>unreached</u> and bring <u>unity</u> to the churches** (15:14-33).

Who Do We Resemble?
The question we're left with is, **Who do we resemble? What are we focusing on? Are we living for the temporary or for the eternal? If Romans 1-11 is true—that everyone desperately needs Jesus—then, by God's grace, we have work to do! We're part of this unfolding Gospel story!**

And I would encourage you to do what I encouraged some college students this week: spend some time alone with the Lord – go for a prayer walk and pick up your journal again if you haven't in a while – and just seek the Lord and His will for your life. Ask Him, "**Lord, what is my part in your mission? Your story? What would you have me do?"** And then ready your heart for His response. Be patient. Be attentive. Be faithful where you're at.