

# Romans (15:19b-22)

## *Pure Ambition*

Part 94 - February 4, 2007

### **PATH AND PURPOSE**

Q: Have you ever used "Google Earth" on the internet?

- This is Jerusalem (here's the temple) ... let's go back up
- This is Albania, but back in Paul's day it was Illyricum; let's pronounce the name together: Illyricum (ih-LIHR-ih-kuhm)
- And just across the water is Italy; and up North is Rome

Okay, let's go back up ... and repeat after me:

- From Jerusalem to Illyricum; from Jerusalem to Illyricum

I think we're ready to read:

So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. 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. Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. - *Romans 15:19b-22 NIV*

Paul conducted three major missionary journeys, and many side expeditions, but he had an overall path, which was: "From Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum" (15:19b)

And within this path Paul had a purpose, which was to: "Proclaim the gospel of Christ"

And what's absolutely incredible is that he accomplished it!

So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ (15:19b)

In less than 25 years, Paul covered over 1,500 Mediterranean miles by boat and by foot, planting churches in strategic cities along Roman trade routes, to ensure the spread of the Gospel.

Thanks to Google-Earth, we can actually fly from Jerusalem, all the way around to Illyricum, passing over many of Paul's cities. We'll be cruising at an altitude of 65,000 feet. What took Paul 25 years is going to take us about 90 seconds.

Now, when Paul said: “I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ”

- He isn't saying that every Mediterranean sinner is now saved.
- He is telling the Romans that he has finished his assignment.

Paul had a path, he had a purpose, and he had a plan:

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 (15:20)

What a great challenge for us! So many people just float from day to day with no sense of spiritual direction, no path, no purpose, and certainly no plan. Paul didn't wake up and wander ... he was on a mission, literally! Paul had something many believers today don't; an: “ambition”

He had a dream, a drive, and determination! And it directed his schedule and shaped the meaning of his life!

Q: His life was dominated by a great, *holy* ambition ... is yours?

Q: Do you drift from day to day without a guiding, holy vision?

Q: How would you answer this: “It has always been my ambition to”

Not everyone should have Paul's specific ambition. Paul himself said that:

- One plants and another waters (1 Cor 3:6-8)
- And that we each have different gifts (Rom 12:6)
- And to his own master each servant stands or falls (Rom 14:4)

But there is an aspect of Paul's ambition that we must share:

To preach the gospel where Christ was not known (15:20a)

You would have to be a very self-centered believer not to want your life to count in some way to meet this need. All around us there are people who have never heard a clear and balanced presentation of the Gospel. We'll talk a lot more about this next week, but for now, we'll just say:



- Holy ambitions are all about exalting Christ

Q: But where does a holy ambition come from?

A: There are two sources for Holy Ambition:

1. First: It comes from an encounter with Christ

Paul had his on the road to Damascus, when Jesus interrupted his plans of persecution, and used his zeal and his O.T. expertise to spread the grace that he himself had received (Acts 26:17-18).

Q: So ask yourself: what has Christ done for me?

This is most-likely how He'll want you to help others in His name; whether it's at home, at school, or on the job. God takes our personality, our background, our experiences, our training, and makes us uniquely suited for our holy ambition.



Q: What excites you? What are you good at?

This is where you begin looking, because God will redirect and redeem whatever we have to offer.

It's *not* about a task or a chore; it's about love and enthusiasm!

- It's about walking in ever-deepening intimacy with God.
- It's about increasing devotion and affection for my wife.
- It's about patiently training and preparing our children.
- It's about real concern for the eternal lives of others.

A holy ambition is something you *really* want to do, that God *really* wants you to do too!

So, first it comes from a personal encounter with Christ.

2. And second: It is confirmed by the Word of God

Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15 as his biblical confirmation:



Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." (15:21)

Paul doesn't rely on experience alone, and neither should we. Ambition must be informed and empowered by God's Word.

And one huge benefit that God's Word will give us regarding our holy ambitions will be to keep them in their proper priority. Paul is talking about his ambition when he says:

This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you (15:22)

If the ambitions that matter most come first, they'll interfere with and supersede other really cool and exciting (but *not* as significant or holy) ambitions in our lives.

Q: Which take a backseat in your life when schedules conflict: your holy ambitions, or other pursuits?



Holy pursuits must have first priority.

There are many good causes and exciting opportunities in life; *too many* in fact. Therefore we must plan and prioritize.

But, to balance it out, we must also be flexible. Even though God is a great communicator, we're not the best listeners.

Paul says that he was often: "hindered" ... that's an interesting word.

Q: Was it the Lord or the enemy who hindered him?

We wanted to come to you — certainly I, Paul, did, again and again — but Satan stopped us. - *1 Thessalonians 2:18 NIV*

So, obviously he means the enemy!

When [Paul and his companions] came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. - *Acts 16:6-8 NIV*

So, obviously he means the Lord!

Truth is it could be either:

- Sometimes the enemy gets the best of us.
- Sometimes it's the Lord redirecting us.

Either way, the Lord will work it out in His own time and way.

Point is, every one of us should have a path, a purpose, and a plan.

- Something we *really* want to do for the glory of God.
- Something that adds focus and passion to our lives.

But we shouldn't be surprised or discouraged when things don't go exactly as we imagined they would.

- Paul did finally get to Rome ... but as a prisoner!