

Romans (15:23-24)

Holding the Rope

Part 95 - February 11, 2007

PIONEER PAUL

For the longest time, Washington State held the record as the most unchurched state in our nation. But we have recently lost that coveted title to Oregon. We're now second, being followed closely by California.

Last week Paul made the staggering claim that:

... from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. - *Romans 15:19b NIV*

Let's do our "Google Earth" chant again: From Jerusalem to Illyricum; from Jerusalem to Illyricum. Here's my point: That's 120 miles *farther* than from Blaine, at the northern boarder of Washington, through Oregon, to San Ysidro, at the southern boarder of California! Paul spread the Gospel farther than Canada is to Mexico!

And let's pick it up right here, and read:

But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. - *Romans 15:23-24 NIV*

As a missionary, Paul's assignment was to win souls, establish churches, teach *them* how to win souls, and then move on. And he has accomplished this from Jerusalem to Illyricum, which is why he says:

There is no more place for me to work in these regions

But when Paul sends a letter to his friend and protégé, Timothy (who was ministering in this same region), Paul writes:

But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, [and] do the work of an evangelist ... - *2 Timothy 4:5 NIV*

Q: What's the difference between a missionary and an evangelist?

A missionary is sent by the Lord (and a church) to another country or another place to share the message of Jesus. An evangelist will reach out to the lost in his own community, his family, and among his friends.



- An evangelist is a *backyard* missionary.

For an evangelist, the mission field is anywhere relationships have been built. Every growing, grateful believer should desire to reunite our loving Creator with His beloved creatures.

A Christian who doesn't care if others come to Christ, is either a counterfeit, a coward, or at best, a contradiction.

TO SPAIN!

So, although Paul has accomplished an incredible feat, he isn't thinking about retirement, he's thinking about Spain!

And since I have been longing for many years to see you I plan to do so when I go to Spain (15:23b-24a)

Q: Why Spain?

First, we need to recall what Jesus told His disciples after His resurrection. It's called the Great Commission:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. - Acts 1:8 NIV

- "Jerusalem" was their hometown; like Burlington.
- "Judea" was comparable to a county; like Skagit.
- "Samaria" is the county next-door; like Whatcom.
- The "ends of the earth" is like the Philippines.

Spain represented the furthestmost extent of the civilized Roman Empire in Paul's day. It was literally, "the ends of the earth." Paul went from Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria, around to Illyricum, and he planned to pass through Rome to get to Spain.

Q: But, how did Paul even know there was such a place as Spain?

I'm guessing that every time he got on a boat he asked the sailors how far west they'd traveled. Who are the people? Are they religious? How do they relate? What's the culture? It's no different than what any competent *backyard missionaries* ask and assess concerning their own communities.

The leadership of this church has considered those very questions (and others) regarding the people of Skagit Valley.

And as a church, we have our own “ends of the earth” as well. For years now, we’ve worked with three unreached people groups:

- A. The Cora Indians in the Sierra Madre Mountains, Mexico.
- B. Poverty-stricken people in Terrazas Del Valle, Tijuana.
- C. The Ibaloi Indians on the island of Luzon, Philippines (by .

We have helped the Ibaloi establish an orphanage, several daycare centers, an elementary school, and a Bible college.

ASSISTING PAUL

Now, last week, Paul said it was his ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. So, why is he going to Rome, where there is already a church?

I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there (15:24b)

He won’t be establishing a church in Rome; he’ll be taking up an offering to finance his missionary journey to Spain. The book of Romans, among other things, is a support letter.

And it’s very important to notice what Paul does *not* say:

- A. He *doesn’t* say: “Those of you who are obedient to the great commission will accompany me to Spain.”
- B. He *does* say: I hope to “visit” you while, “passing through” and to have you “Assist me on my journey” there.



He’s asking them to become partners, senders, and supporters. There are two missionary misconceptions:

1. Only *super-Christians* become missionaries
2. Every *true* Christian becomes a missionary

Both are false. The Bible does *not* assume that everyone goes.

Some sightseers were upriver from a roaring waterfall when a young girl suddenly fell in the river. Everyone screamed! But a quick-thinking man grabbed a rope, tied it around his waist, and dove in. The crowd was tense and silent as the man swam through the swirling waters directly toward the falls. He reached the little girl just in time, and everyone cheered! And then he yelled, “Pull in the rope!” But to their horror, the spectators realized that no one had the rope.

- There is equal honor in holding the rope!

Q: So, how do you want the story to end?



- a) The spectators can stand by and watch as the rescuer, the rescuee, and the rope all go over the falls together.
- b) Or: just as the tail end slips into the icy water, one of the bystanders can grab it and pull. But the force is too much! So together they heave and haul them to safety!

We *are* the ones who make the decision for how it ends.



When it comes to missions, we have three options:

1. Dive in
2. Hold the rope
3. Spectate

If you received a year-end financial report from the church, you may have noticed that 21.5% of our giving in '06 went to local and foreign missions! (Not including special events like Operation Christmas Child or Souper Bowl Sunday!)

So, I'm sure not trying to guilt anybody into giving more. I just want you to understand the honor of holding the rope.

I also thought this would be a good time for our own Apostle Paul to remind us how we can dive in, or hold the rope. Nick, come on up.

[Nick explains the mission opportunities available]

ENJOYABLE COMPANY

I like how Paul ends here. He says he'll continue on his journey to the ends of the earth:



After I have enjoyed your company for a while (15:24c)

Paul knows the value of *enjoying* God's people. We weren't designed to go it alone. Discouragement comes when we're detached and disconnected.

We were designed to hold the ropes of faith together, and to take responsibility for pulling one another to safety.

We see more of God, we know more of God, and we share more of God, when we enjoy the company His people.