

The Missionary and the Missional Church – Part 3 (Romans 15:14-21)

The Cost of Taking the Gospel Where Christ Has Not Been Named

Last time, I ever so briefly related the account of Andrew Fuller and William Carey, whom together God used to ignite the modern mission movement. You will recall Fuller's description of their relationship, when, in 1792 they started the Baptist Missionary Society:

Our undertaking to India really appeared to me, on its commencement, to be somewhat like a few men, who were deliberating about the importance of penetrating into a deep mine, which had never before been explored. We had no one to guide us; and while we were deliberating, Carey, as it were, said, 'Well, I will go down, if *you* will hold the rope.'¹

And so they did. Carey departed the following year for Serampore, India, where he would spend the next forty years, bearing much fruit amidst much suffering. And Fuller spent the next twenty-three years working tirelessly to raise support and administrate the society from England.

This morning, I'd like to briefly introduce you to another pioneering Baptist missionary, this time an American by the name of Adoniram Judson. Judson is a fascinating character in the history of missions. Passing by the incredible story of Judson's conversion, his remarkable courtship with Ann Haseltine, and his capture by the French on his way to secure mission support in London, and his improbable escape from a French prison, which are stories for another time, I want to focus on his mission work.² Interestingly, Judson did not set out as a Baptist. Rather, he was a Congregationalist, appointed by their mission society for service in India. In February 1812, Judson and his wife along with six others (including Luther Rice, who would become in America what Fuller was in England) set sail for Serampore. On the long, 114-day journey, Judson studied the Scriptures and began to question his infant baptism. By the time he arrived in India, he was a convinced Baptist. In Calcutta, Adoniram, his wife, and Rice received believer's baptism by immersion. But this posed a problem: they were sent out and supported by the Congregationalists, who practiced infant baptism. No longer able in good

¹ Paul Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian*, Studies in Baptist Life and Thought (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 34.

² See John Piper, *Filling Up the Afflictions of Christ: The Cost of Bringing the Gospel to the Nations in the Lives of William Tyndale, Adoniram Judson, and John Paton* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 89-93. This biographical sketch of Judson's life follows Piper's.

conscience to plant Congregationalist churches, they were forced to renounce their commission and separate from their Congregationalist mission partners. Ann Judson, Adoniram's wife, described the situation in this way:

Thus, we are confirmed Baptists, not because we wanted to be, but because truth compelled us to be. We have endeavored to count the cost, and be prepared for the many severe trials resulting from this change of sentiment. We anticipate the loss of reputation, and of the affection and esteem of many of our American friends. But the most trying circumstances attending this change, and that which has caused us most pain, is the separation which must take place between us and our dear missionary associates. . . . We feel that we are alone in the world, with no real friend but each other, no one on whom we can depend but God.³

And so, almost immediately upon their arrival, Luther Rice returned to America in order to resign their Congregationalist mission and raise support from among the Baptists. Meanwhile, the Judsons, stayed for a time with William Carey in Serampore.

But they did not stay long. Driven by the same impulse which drove the apostle Paul to take the gospel where Christ had not been named, they left Serampore and sailed across the Bay of Bengal to Rangoon, Burma (modern-day Malaysia). As one biographer put it, "There began a lifelong battle in 108-degree heat with cholera, malaria, dysentery, and unknown miseries that would take two of Judson's wives, seven of his thirteen children, and colleague after colleague in death."⁴ Life was brutal as Judson labored to learn the language, translate the Bible, and evangelize the lost (i.e. everyone in Burma). It was six years before he baptized his first convert in 1819. Even then, the harvest did not immediately come. In 1823, the Judsons moved three hundred miles inland. But Adoniram was soon arrested as a western spy, imprisoned and tortured. He spent eighteen months in the horrid conditions of a Burmese prison. The next year his wife died. The year after that, their daughter succumbed to illness. Alone in the "tiger-infested jungle," Judson spent the better part of two years teetering on the edge of sanity, sitting beside a grave he dug for himself and contemplating his own mortality. "God is to me the Great Unknown. I believe in him, but I find him not," he wrote.⁵

³ Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 146; quoted in Piper, 94-95.

⁴ Piper, 95.

⁵ Anderson, 391; quoted in Piper, 100.

But in 1831, the Spirit of God began to move in Burma. Listen to what he wrote in his diary in 1831:

The spirit of inquiry . . . is spreading everywhere, through the whole length and breadth of the land. [We have distributed] nearly 10,000 tracts, giving to none but those who ask. I presume there have been 6,000 applications at the house. Some come two or three months' journey, from the borders of Siam and China – “Sir, we hear that there is an eternal hell. We are afraid of it. Do give us a writing that will tell us how to escape it.” Others, from the frontiers of Kathay, 100 miles north of Ava – “Sir, we have seen a writing that tells about an eternal God. Are you the man that gives away such writings? If so, pray give us one, for we want to know the truth before we die.” Others, from the interior of the country, where the name of Jesus Christ is little known – “Are you Jesus Christ's man? Give us a writing that tells us about Jesus Christ.”⁶

By 1832, Judson completed his translation of the New Testament; by 1834, he completed the Old. Also in 1834, Judson remarried to the widow of another missionary, and they spent ten happy years together. He continued to revise his translation of the Bible and preached seven times a week; she translated *The Pilgrim's Progress*. They had eight children, five of whom survived into adulthood, which was pretty good even for the civilized world in the early 19th century, let alone on the frontiers of Burma. But then sickness struck again. His wife, Sarah, died in 1845; Judson died five years later.

What did Judson have to show for all the years of suffering service in the ministry of the gospel where the name of Christ was not known? Was it worth it? Only the light of eternity will reveal what Christ accomplished through him and his three wives, who were every bit as courageous as he was. But we know what Judson left behind: an entire Burmese Bible, a Burmese-English dictionary, hundreds of Burmese converts, and today, about 3,700 Baptist churches in Myanmar that can trace their lineage to Judson's ministry. Some may say, “But look at what it cost him! Countless sufferings, the temporary loss of his sanity, two wives, seven children!” Yes, but it should be mentioned that every child in those days had about a fifty-fifty chance of survival, no matter where they lived, and Judson's third wife returned to New England after his death, where she contracted tuberculosis and died. The point is, everyone dies. The driving passion of your life mustn't be *not to die*. Rather, your driving passion ought to be to

⁶ Anderson, 398-399; quoted in Piper, 97.

make your life count. Make it your life's ambition to make Christ known among the nations, to fulfill the Great Commission and usher in the end of the age, whether that be here in Nixa as part of a missional church, or there in the Burmese jungle as a missionary. Make your life count for the cause of Christ among the nations. Reflecting upon Jesus' words in John 12:24:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (Jn 12:24)

John Piper writes, "The question is not whether we will die, but whether we will die in a way that bears much fruit."⁷ At First Baptist Nixa, let's make our lives, and our deaths, count.

The Marks of a Pauline Missionary

For the past few weeks in Romans, we have been thinking through the subject of missions and the church. In the second half of Romans 15, Paul, having concluded his treatise on redemptive theology (redemption required [1-3], accomplished [3-5], applied [6-8], designed [9-11], and lived out[12-15]), Paul turns his attention to his main purpose in writing – to secure a missions partnership with the church at Rome. The year is AD 57, Paul has been preaching the gospel and planting churches throughout the eastern Roman empire for twelve years, and now he senses it is time to press on to the west, to Spain and beyond. But in order to accomplish this mission, he needs a new sending church located on the edge of the western empire, a church to supply him for his journey and send him out. He wants the church at Rome to be that church.

The second half of Romans 15, therefore, tells us a great deal about the relationship between the local church and the great commission to make disciples of all nations. We saw in the first sermon why Paul wanted to partner with the Roman church. It wasn't merely a matter of their strategic location, although that was surely a part of it. Rather, we noted from v. 14 (as well as 1:8) that Paul wanted to partner with this church because of their faith, their goodness, their knowledge, and their wisdom. These four characteristics make a good and viable mission partner church that is capable of accomplishing the three main tasks of a missional church: proclaiming the gospel in word and deed right where they are, praying fervently and faithfully for their missions partners who are scattered abroad, and providing the finances necessary for the mission.

⁷ Piper, 107.

But this passage not only tells us about what Paul considered a good missional church, it also reveals a great deal about Paul the missionary. In fact, we are in the process of identifying seven characteristics of a Pauline missionary. The driving thesis of this four-part study of the second half of Romans 15 is that *we want to be the kind of church Paul would want to partner with, and we want to partner with the kind of missionaries Paul was*. So far, we have seen that a Pauline missionary is marked by:

- I. *An orthodox theology* – an essential component of the great commission is teaching all the words of Christ (Mt 28:19). Therefore, a missionary must have a good grasp of all the words of Christ and be able to explain them to others. To put it another way, they ought to be able to write something like Romans (v. 15).
- II. *A confident authority* – they must know they have been called and commissioned by Christ if they are to have the boldness to preach Christ among the nations, many of whom are indifferent or hostile to the gospel (vv. 15-16).
- III. *A theocentric [God-centered] philosophy* – Paul viewed the task of missions quite differently than many. He viewed himself as a priest of God, gathering sacrificial lambs, slaying them with the sword of the gospel, and offering them as an acceptable sacrifice to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, they go out of love for God and His glory, which is not to be divorced from love and compassion for sinners. But the love of the glory of God will abide even when the love for sinners fades in the face of rejection and persecution (v. 16).
- IV. *A Calvinistic soteriology [doctrine of salvation]* – they need to know that salvation is a work of God's sovereign grace from beginning to end (vv. 17-18). They need to know and love the truths expressed in Romans 9-11, that all who call upon the name of the LORD will be saved, but those who call upon Christ are precisely those who have been chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world. They need to be like Andrew Fuller and William Carey (and Adoniram Judson, for that matter), combining a high view of God's sovereignty in salvation with an understanding that God uses missionaries and missionary preaching to save His elect from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. Believing that salvation depends not on human will or effort, but on God who has mercy (Rom 9:16) will prevent the missionary from giving into pragmatism (doing what works rather than what God has commanded) or

despair (when visible results are not immediately forthcoming). I sincerely doubt that anyone without a steadfast faith in God's electing grace could have stayed in India for seven years (Carey) or Burma for six years (Judson), amidst tremendous suffering, before seeing even one convert. But they stayed through the suffering, through the years of apparently fruitless toil, and in due time they reaped an incredible harvest. We need robust Calvinist (that is, Pauline) missionaries.

V. Discipleship-Focused Methodology

Today we are going to pick up the last three marks of a Pauline missionary. The fifth mark is a discipleship-focused methodology. What I mean is that their ministry is aimed at making disciples, not merely decisions; they strive to make Christians, not merely converts. When I was at First Baptist Buffalo, the pastor of the Assemblies of God church down the street was very involved in missions through the Assemblies' global headquarters in Springfield. It seemed he was always off on a mission trip somewhere in Africa. One day I asked him about his mission work, and he told me about these enormous crusades they would hold drawing tens of thousands of people to hear the gospel where they would see thousands of professions of faith. I didn't say anything at the time, but I had heard about African crusades from other sources who were skeptical (to say the least) about the lasting impact of crusade evangelism in Africa and the legitimacy of the so-called conversions that occurred there.

I share their skepticism about the long-term effectiveness of mass evangelism as a missions methodology. The fact is that Jesus did not commission the church to make converts on the basis of a decision made one night in a massive soccer stadium; He commissioned the church to make disciples who would be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and then taught to obey the word of Christ. And where are disciples baptized and taught the word of Christ? In gathered churches. The great commission is more than evangelism. I don't mean to cast aspersions on the Assemblies of God and their missions methodology; mass evangelism is not the only part of their missions strategy. They plant churches as well. But there is a difference between reaching the nations *and* planting churches, and reaching the nations *by* planting churches. We want to work with missionaries who do the latter. That is, we want to partner with missionaries who have a discipleship-focused mission methodology; we want to partner with missionaries who understand that their task does not end with evangelism, but rather begins with

evangelism and is fulfilled by baptism and incorporation into a local church where they will be taught to obey all things that Christ has commanded.

Where do we see this in Romans 15? I find it in v. 18:

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience – by word and deed... (15:18)

Notice how Paul describes the goal of his ministry – indeed, the goal of Christ’s ministry through him. It is not what we might expect. I might have expected Paul to say that his aim was “to bring the Gentiles to faith,” but instead he says, “to bring the Gentiles to obedience.” Is that significant? I think so. It is reminiscent of Paul’s words at the beginning of Romans, where he likewise described the aim of his apostolic ministry:

... through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations...” (1:5)

As I argued two years ago when we looked at that passage, I think what Paul means is “the obedience that comes from faith” or “the obedience that is the fruit of faith.” And I think he means the same thing here in 15:18 (as well as 16:26, where he says the same thing).⁸ When Paul thought about the goal of his ministry, about what he was attempting to do, it was not the making of momentary decisions (bringing people to faith), it was the making of lifelong disciples (bringing people to the obedience of faith). You can bring people to faith simply by declaring the gospel to them, whether in a coffee shop or in a soccer stadium. But you cannot bring people to the obedience of faith without bringing them into the fellowship of a local church, where they will receive the day-by-day, week-by-week, year-by-year teaching of all the words of Christ, and the help and support and exhortation and accountability they need to apply that word to every

⁸ “And ‘obedience’ will therefore have the same meaning here as in this earlier verse, denoting comprehensively the believers’ response to the Lord Jesus Christ, including, but not limited to, faith”; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 892. Stott writes, “It is surprising that he now omits any reference to faith, for of course his objective is to bring people to Christ, indeed to faith in Christ (e.g. 1:16). Nevertheless, his emphasis is on obedience, presumably because it is the indispensable consequence of saving faith, and is a vital ingredient of Christian discipleship”; John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, TBST (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1994), 380.

aspect of their life. And without that lifelong growth in obedience and transformation into the image of Christ, their faith is worthless and dead, just like so many decisions made in emotionally-charged moments under the powerful psychological pressures provoked in mass evangelistic meetings.

So when we talk to prospective mission partners, we must ask about their methodology. If it is not centered in the establishing of strong, healthy, biblical churches where lifelong disciples will be made and nurtured, then we ought not support them. If they are not thinking past the moment of decision of faith to the lifelong obedience of faith, then they are not thinking about missions like Paul thought about missions. For Paul, the goal of missions was the obedience of faith, which takes years and strong churches, not moments and packed stadiums.

VI. Charismatic Pneumatology

The sixth mark of a Pauline missionary is a charismatic pneumatology. Now, I need to explain these words. First, *pneumatology* refers to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (πνεῦμα = Spirit). What kind of doctrine of the Holy Spirit do they need to have? Specifically, a *charismatic* doctrine of the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? Well, χαρίσματα (= gifts) refers to the gifts of the Holy Spirit which He distributes to the church for the work of the ministry (cf. Rom 12:6). We spoke at length about these charismatic gifts when we were in Romans 12:3-8 and I preached two sermons entitled, “The Charismatic Church” – that is, the church that possesses and practices the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I contend that biblically speaking, every true believer is a charismatic and every true church is a charismatic church. That is, every true church is comprised of believers who are baptized by the Spirit and possess particular spiritual gifts (χαρισμάτα) distributed according to sovereign will of the Spirit. The distinction between “charismatic” and “non-charismatic” churches is, in my view, a false distinction. Any believer who is not baptized by the Spirit is not a true believer, and any church that does not possess and practice the gifts of the Spirit is not a true church. We shouldn’t be afraid of the term “charismatic,” and we shouldn’t forfeit that vocabulary to the Pentecostals.

We should not force upon the biblical text a false distinction between those gifts deemed miraculous and those deemed non-miraculous, regarding the miraculous as having ceased while the non-miraculous remain. *All* the gifts of the Spirit are supernatural and they *all* continue throughout the present age, though not necessarily in the same proportion or distribution or

degree. Rather, I propose that the church experiences extraordinary seasons in which the Spirit works in extraordinary ways through the more extraordinary gifts (as in Acts), and ordinary seasons in which the Spirit works in ordinary ways through the more ordinary gifts (as in 1-2 Timothy and Titus).

Now, I propose that pioneering missions – i.e. taking the gospel where Christ has not been named – is an extraordinary ministry that is sometimes, perhaps often, but not always, accompanied by extraordinary gifts and working of the Spirit. When I read the book of Acts, which is a book about early church missions, and I see the apostles pressing back the kingdom of darkness with the gospel of light, I find that Peter and Paul and the rest of the church frequently experienced “signs and wonders” which served to authenticate the preaching of the gospel and their authority as messengers of God. That is precisely what Paul is describing in v. 19:

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience – by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God...” (vv. 18-19a)

The purpose of “signs” (σημεία) and “wonders” (τέρατα) is to authenticate the word and the witnesses of God. They are not an end in themselves; the goal is not to amaze people with extraordinary power. The goal, rather, is to convince them that, “These people are from God; I must listen to what they say.” That is the way the author of Hebrews described their use:

[The message] was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Heb 2:3b-4)

Notice that Paul says it was both word *and* deed, the gospel of Christ *and* the power of signs and wonders, all performed by the power of the Spirit of God, that brought the Gentiles to obedience.

So what does this mean for our missionary partners? It does not mean that they must have participated in divine healing or performed signs and wonders themselves. In fact, if they are coming from ordinary ministry where the church is already established, I would expect that they have never seen such things. Rather, it means two things. First, it means that they must conceive

of their ministry in supernatural terms. Missions is not merely going to another culture, to a people with a different worldview, and trying to convince them of the truthfulness of the biblical worldview. Missionaries mustn't go armed merely with intellectual, philosophical, rational arguments. Their struggle is not against flesh and blood, and the problem they face is not predominantly intellectual. It is spiritual. They are going into a spiritual war zone. And therefore, they must go in the power of the Spirit, in word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, if God should so will. They must go in the confident hope that God will raise sinners from spiritual death to spiritual life, and they must go open to the idea that God can and sometimes does raise people from physical death to physical life in order to testify to the word of the gospel and the power of God. They are going to fight a supernatural battle, and they need to be armed with supernatural weapons.

And second, it means that they recognize there is a difference between the ordinary and the extraordinary ministry, and that they are embarking upon the extraordinary. Therefore, words like "signs and wonders" don't scare them. They rather expect the Spirit to do such things as they launch their assault upon the kingdom of darkness. So just to be painfully clear, by *charismatic* I do not mean they must speak in tongues, or have the gift of prophesy, or have experience with healing or other kinds of miracles. Rather, I want them to be biblically open to such gifts of the Spirit because they are embarking upon a spiritual war and they need spiritual power.

The ministry of the gospel is both word *and* deed, verbal *and* visual.⁹ In the ordinary ministry setting, those deeds, that visual manifestation of the Spirit's power, is you – the radically transformed lives of the saints bears greater witness to the power of God and the veracity of the gospel than miracles ever could. But on the missions frontier, where Christ has not been named and there are no churches and no saints, often it pleases God to bear witness to His gospel and His power through signs and wonders, and Pauline missionaries understand this.

VII. Pioneering Missiology

Finally, the last mark of a Pauline missionary to be found in this passage is that they have a pioneering missiology. That is, they understand that the task of missions is to take the gospel where it isn't, to take the name of Christ where it is not known, to plant churches where none exist, to make disciples where the word of Christ is not yet known nor obeyed.

⁹ Stott, 380.

... so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ, and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written,

*"Those who have never been told of him will see,
and those who have never heard will understand." (15:19b-21)*

The geographical region Paul describes covers the northeastern quadrant of the Mediterranean. Jerusalem, of course, is where Paul departed from when he was converted on the road to Damascus, when Christ called and commissioned him for the Gentile mission. Illyricum is the region north and west of Macedonia, encompassing the modern-day Balkan States (Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Albania, etc.). Now, notice three points about Paul's statement in these verses.

First, Paul claims to have "fulfilled" (πληρώω) his ministry of the gospel of Christ in these regions. But how could this be? We're talking about a period of only twelve years or so, during which Paul mainly stuck to the major cities (Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, etc.). He did not preach in every city, nor to every individual. So how is it that his ministry was fulfilled? It is not the job of a missionary to preach the gospel to every person in every city. It is the job of the missionary to plant churches in regions where the name of Christ is not known, and then it is the job of the church to reach their city and their surrounding region. Paul had planted churches capable of evangelizing the regions from Jerusalem to Illyricum. It was now time to move on and let the churches fulfill *their* ministry.¹⁰

Second, Paul's passion was to lay new foundations, not to build upon established foundations. There are others who are called to do that, like Timothy and Apollos. This is, in fact, the primary difference between pastors and missionaries. Missionaries lay the foundations of the church in a given region, and then they pass off the responsibility for building upon that foundation to pastors who continue the work while the missionaries go to a new region where no churches exist and where Christ is not named. It seems to me that this is inherent in the

¹⁰ See Moo's defense of this view; Moo, 896.

missionary calling. Missionaries are pioneers. Doug Moo writes, “Paul here indicates that he believed that God had given him the ministry of establishing strategic churches in virgin gospel territory; like the early American pioneers who pulled up stakes anytime they could see the smoke from another’s person’s cabin, Paul felt ‘crowded’ by too many Christians.”¹¹

Missionaries do not complete the great commission; churches complete the great commission. Missionaries plant churches that will fulfill the great commission. And once those churches are planted and able to get to work, the missionary moves on.

Third, Paul then quotes Isaiah 52:15 to show that he saw his missionary calling as part of God’s foreordained plan to reach the nations with the gospel of Christ and create for Himself worshipers from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. In other words, missionaries need to see themselves as part of God’s global redemptive plan. Therefore, they are not satisfied to stay where the harvest is ripe, but are driven by a passion to go where no seeds have yet been planted.

This has massive ramifications for our church’s mission philosophy and mission budget. I am convinced that our mission strategy ought to be directed toward those nations that have never heard the name of Christ and where there are no churches yet, rather than to those places where the churches already exist, and are responsible for fulfilling the great commission. And that means the kind of missionaries we want to partner with share that same burden. I want to hear them say, “Why would I go where Christ is already proclaimed, where the church already exists? Let them reach their own people in their own region. I’m going where there is no gospel, where there is no church, because God has promised that He has a people there, waiting to be gathered, and I’m going to find them.” That is the heart of a pioneer; that is the heart of a Pauline missionary. And that is the kind of missionary we want to partner with.

To the church has been given the great commission, to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all the commands of Christ (Mt 28:19). And the way the church accomplishes this commission is by making disciples of our own nation, and by sending missionaries to those nations where Christ is not known. The time has come for First Baptist Nixa to get serious about this commission.

¹¹ Moo, 896.