

21 July 2024

Isaiah 66:18-23

¹⁸ “And I, because of what they have planned and done, am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages, and they will come and see my glory.

¹⁹ “I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations—to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations. ²⁰ And they will bring all your people, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the LORD—on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels,” says the LORD. “They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the LORD in ceremonially clean vessels. ²¹ And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites,” says the LORD.

²² “As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the LORD, “so will your name and descendants endure. ²³ From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the LORD.

Romans 15:14-33

Paul the Minister to the Gentiles

¹⁴ I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. ¹⁵ Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷ Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. ¹⁸ I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the

Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done— ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So, from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ Rather, as it is written:

“Those who were not told about him will see,
and those who have not heard will understand.”

²² This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.

Paul's Plan to Visit Rome

²³ 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 visit you, ²⁴ I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵ Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. ²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. ²⁷ They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. ²⁸ So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. ²⁹ I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

³⁰ I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. ³¹ Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favourably received by the Lord's people there, ³² so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed. ³³ The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Ministry Motivators: Why Do Ministry?

Roman 15:14–33

Rev. Jason Forbes

As Christians, we should be loving and caring for each other, and reaching out to the community. So, here's a few questions: How long should you keep praying for someone when there seems to be no answer? How long should you continue being hospitable to someone when there are significant differences? How do we tell our community the gospel when our message isn't welcomed?

Behind each of these questions there is an even broader question of what should motivate our ministry? Why should we do ministry?

Now, at this point some of you might be thinking, "Oh good, he's not talking to me. I haven't been to Bible college. I'm don't do anything up the front. I don't have any leadership roles. I'm not in ministry."

Let me be perfectly clear. If you are a Christian; If you are a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ; If you believe that Jesus died for the forgiveness of your sins and rose again so that you may enjoy eternal life; then God taken you out of the world with all of its worries. You are now in his glorious kingdom, and he has set you apart for his purposes. You are, indeed, in ministry! Full-time ministry, no less. So yes, I'm talking to you. Even if you're a retired ordained minister, or an ordained elder no longer on session, you are still in full-time ministry. So, we need to think about what motivates our ministry.

In the lead up to closing his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul shares what motivates his ministry. And it should come as no surprise that it's the gospel. The gospel drives him to:

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- 1. Identify with the people to whom he is ministering.**
- 2. Include those who have been excluded.**
- 3. Involve others in his ministry.**

These points provide a framework for how our ministry is to be motivated.

Firstly, we are to identify with those to whom we are ministering.

Paul begins by identifying with those he is writing to and refers to them as his brothers (v. 14). Now, this is a church that Paul did not start. Someone else started the church in Rome. This church was a mixed church with both Jews and Gentiles – that is, anyone who wasn't a Jew. Traditionally Jews did not talk to Gentiles. Especially well-educated Jews like Paul. But he addresses this mixed group as “my brothers”.

Furthermore, because Paul recognises that he is one of them, even though he has never met them, he has confidence in them. When Paul says that they are full of goodness and complete in knowledge, he is not saying that they are now without sin and know everything there is to know. Rather, he is recognising their competency in being able to instruct each other. They are on about the same thing as he is.

This doesn't mean that there aren't any differences. Of course, there are differences! Paul has had to write to them very strongly on some of those points (v. 15). But Paul and the church at Rome are still on about the same thing - to proclaim the gospel, seeing people come to Jesus, and be set aside for God's purposes (v. 16).

It worries me that we can so easily go into ministry with an “us and them” mentality. That we somehow think of ourselves as superior to those to whom we are ministering.

One time, in my role as Disability Advocate, I was invited to visit a church that had a large number of people with disabilities as part of their congregation. While there, I very much got the sense that I was expected to go over to those disabled people “over there” and “do my thing” - whatever my thing was supposed to be. The problem was, as included as these people were, no one was really identifying with them. It took me all weekend to get through to the church leaders that I was to support them to do their thing - proclaim the gospel, and this starts by identifying with them.!

Another time I went to a Christmas event in a church in New Zealand that ran a separated ministry for people with disabilities. At one point in the presentation, one organiser got up and said how wonderful it was for these people to have their own space and not disturb the rest of us. If there was ever a church that needed disturbing, it was that one!

We need to identify with those to whom we are ministering. Of course, they'll be differences! We all come from different backgrounds and experiences. Especially when disability is involved. But there are also commonalities. Particularly that we have been set aside for God's purposes.

Secondly, we are to include those who haven't been included.

Travelling around in the Roman Empire was not something you did unless you had to. Regardless of this Paul was quite an intrepid traveller. He would go where the gospel had not been (vv. 17–21). This does not mean that Paul shared the gospel with every single person in every single house. But it does mean Paul is looking for ministry opportunities that weren't being taken up already by someone else. Because Paul wasn't out there to make a name for himself, or to show how his ministry is better than someone else's. It's not his ministry anyway! It's been given to him by God, so all that Paul will talk about is Jesus.

So, it's worth thinking about our community as a church and the work that is being done, and work that isn't being done. What are the needs in our community that aren't being met? This might involve people from non-English speaking backgrounds, single parents, divorcées, estranged children, people with disabilities.

How can we meet needs that government programs fall short of? And government programs do fall short. I can tell you; the NDIS is not meeting all the needs of people with disabilities. There's plenty of room for ministry in that space. We're not going out there to compete with the church down the road. We're out there to glory in Jesus and to talk about him in places where the gospel hasn't been.

Thirdly, we are to involve those we minister to in ministry.

Consistent with his resolve to go where the gospel has not been before, Paul sets his sights on Spain (v. 24). Yet, this is not something that he fancies he can do himself. He wants the support of the church in Rome for his mission to Spain. Whether or not Paul reached Spain we can't be certain. There is some evidence from the church fathers that he did, but there's no biblical evidence. We certainly know Paul was planning to go to Spain.

So, what would this support look like? Paul gives the example of how churches in Macedonia and Achaia were supporting impoverished Christians in Jerusalem (v. 26). They were happy to give that support because that's where the gospel came from (v. 27). It wasn't just to meet their financial needs, but it was a way of fellowship with the believers in Jerusalem and forming a bond with them. It was a way of identifying with their fellow believers.

In a similar way, Paul expects to involve the Christians in Rome in his ministry in Spain (v. 24). He wants them to be part of what he is doing through Christ. Not just in terms of money and possessions, but also through prayer for what he was doing in the meantime. Jerusalem was no place for a Jew with Gentile friends, and there was concern over how the support of Gentile believers would be accepted by Jewish believers.

When and how Paul would arrive in Rome, if at all depended on how things went in Jerusalem. This is what Paul encourages the believers in Rome to pray (v. 31). To pray for Paul was to strive with him in ministry. As it was, Paul did go to Rome with all expenses paid as a prisoner of the state. For Paul, the only thing that mattered was the gospel.

As we do ministry, we are not to think it's all one way with us doing all the work. As we minister to others, we are to expect for them to minister. Perhaps not in the same way. Perhaps only in a very tiny way. But a way, nonetheless, that shows they are part of us, fellowshiping with us, and being part of what we are doing is Christ.

In my work as the Disability Advocate, one of the concerns I hear is, while there has been an improvement in the acceptance of people with disabilities in the church, they are not often seen as potential contributors. The danger in this stance is the church can readily become puffed up with pride instead of being humbled by the wonder of what Christ can achieve through such people. We need to recognise the potential of those we minister to as having the potential to minister themselves.

Conclusion

So, when do you stop praying for someone, being hospitable, and reaching out to the community? You don't. Because that's what we do as Christians. Each of us are in full-time ministry. If we recognise commonality with the people to whom we are ministering, if we are truly concerned for those who have yet to hear Christ, if we want to see others participating in the church, then why would any of us want to stop ministering?

The mystery of the gospel is profound. That God most holy would send his Son as a sacrificial substitute for the forgiveness of sins and rise from the dead so that sinners can fellowship with him and be part of his eternal purposes. That is to motivate our ministry.