

## **Sermon 204: Romans 15:19: Paul the Church Planter**

### **OUTLINE**

Churches make disciples  
Churches make missionaries

### **INTRODUCTION**

How do you see the Great Commission being fulfilled? Some think that it is not our job but it was the job of the original apostles, this cannot be the case because the command to preach to all nations lasts as long as the promise of Christ's presence does, till the end of the age. Some have a picture of mass evangelism in their minds where Billy Graham style crusades are done all over the world until millions of Christians are saved. Some see every Christian being a missionary and if each one reaches one then the world can be reached that way. Today as we continue to look at the ministry of Paul, I want to argue that Paul's view of fulfilling the Great Commission is this: to plant local churches all over the world in strategic locations. You see in order to make disciples you need a whole church. We are not merely called to make converts, but disciples who obey all the commands of Christ which include getting baptised, observing the Lord's Supper, submitting to elders, practicing church discipline, meeting together, sitting under the word, praying with one another and loving one another, among other things. One on one evangelism, campus ministry, even mentoring does not do all of this only getting someone saved and into a church does. Secondly, we will see by Paul's method that instead of making sure every single person in an area hears the gospel, if there is a church in a strategic location which will act as leaven and finally affect the area around it, one can be content with planting a church and moving on.

The text that points us to Paul's method is Romans 15:19, 'by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God---so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.' A few things to note from this verse. Firstly, we need to see that Paul says he has fulfilled his ministry from Jerusalem to Illyricum. Jerusalem is on the eastern side of the Mediterranean, and Illyricum is the large area north of all those places lining the northern shore of the Mediterranean. Paul is claiming that a large area of land from Italy all the way around the Mediterranean has been reached for the gospel. How? Had every person in that area been preached to? No! so how then could Paul say he has fulfilled his ministry? Look down at verse v23, 'But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you.' He has fulfilled his ministry and he has no room for work in these regions, what is he talking about? Paul understands that his goal is not to preach to every single soul, but rather to plant churches in strategic locations where Christ has not been reached, and then from those churches the message will continue to be broadcast.

Secondly, please notice that Paul says from Jerusalem to Illyricum? So what! This matters, Paul's home church and sending church was Antioch not Jerusalem. Why then would he say from Jerusalem to Illyricum? Because he is thinking in terms of the Great Commission. Acts 1:8, 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'" (see also Luke 24:47). He sees himself on a mission to fulfil Christ's command to make disciples of all nations beginning in Jerusalem. How does he do this? By peaching to every individual in the world? No! Instead he targets key cities from which the gospel will travel along the Roman roads and infiltrate a whole area like leaven. Once he has established a church, even though all have not heard in that area, it is time to move on.

So let's think then on how the church is necessary to making disciples and then how churchplanting is the key way we should be seeking to fulfil the great commission.

### **Churches make disciples**

The sort of evangelism that went on in the last half of the twentieth century in western countries, that most of us were exposed to is not the model of Paul's ministry. We fell into a conversion mentality. The doctrines that divided Christians like church government, baptism, the Lord's Supper, church discipline and others were marginalised as saving souls became the central focus. Evangelistic crusades were judged for their effectiveness on how many souls were saved. But Christ calls us to make disciples not merely to save souls. There have been some attempts to balance this soul saving mindset and so we have seen the rise of the discipleship movement where people like the Navigators stressed discipleship, mentoring and follow up as a crucial and missing aspect. We should be grateful for this but Paul's method goes further. When he went taking the gospel from town to town he did not make an altar call and then assign a spiritual mentor he started churches so that the new converts would become true disciples. Here is a sample of Paul's ministry from his first missionary journey with Barnabas, Acts 14:21-23, 'When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.23 And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.' Paul and Barnabas had made a tour of these towns preaching the gospel, but making converts was not merely their goal, on their return visit on the way home they made sure that elders were established in every place. In other words, they made sure that church leaders were put in place. Elders have the role of leading the flock, preaching the word, baptising new converts, lead the disciplinary procedures, etc. Paul recognised that you can only make disciples by adding them to a church. We see this again in the ministry of Titus. Paul sends him to set up churches by appointing elders in every town, 1:5, 'This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.' Paul and Titus had been ministering in Crete, but preaching the gospel is not enough, Paul leaves Titus behind to structure a church.

If you analyse the Great Commission you will see that the church is implicit. Matt. 28:18-20, 'And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" Firstly, we see that the Great Commission is a command to make disciples. A disciple is someone who is a learner who takes on an understudy role and is defined as a follower. A convert is not a disciple. Secondly, we see that those who hear and respond are to be baptised. Baptism is an initiation ceremony which identifies you with a group of people, namely the church. So you are initiated, and identified with a certain group, and this also implies that there has to be someone who does the baptising, namely the elders, or an elder approved person. You cannot randomly baptise people, and who is to do the baptising, they are to be approved before being baptised and it needs to be done in a fashion that accords with Scripture. So implied in the baptising is authority and proper order, namely church government. But then we are told that all those who are baptised and disciples must then be taught all the commands of Christ. This implies a body of doctrine and a teaching ministry. And if you examine the various commands that Christ gives there are many that point towards us being a part of a church. Matt. 18:15-20 talks about the churches role in church discipline. How can you obey this command if you are not part of the church? John 13:34-35 is the new

commandment where believers are commanded to love one another in a life giving sacrificial way Christ did. How can we fulfil this command if we are only casual acquaintances? And how will the world know you are Christ's followers if you are not a part with them? Think on the command of the Great Commission, it implies the church. How can we fulfil this command apart from the church? We cannot. It takes a church to make a disciple and truly fulfil the great commission. If we are to see someone converted, and then grown, and then begin to serve according to their spiritual gifts, the church is necessary for spiritual health and growth.

Let's say you are here today and the Lord has been working on your heart and you want to become a Christian what does this look like? It begins by hearing a message from the lips of those Christ has sent into the world. The message is a simple one. God made mankind to be in a relationship with Himself. But we sinned and sin, and are under judgement. In sin we experience heartache and emptiness, we harm ourselves and others. Our pains and our sins are signs to us of our great problem. But our problem is worse than we ever could have imagined. Because of our crimes against God's laws, laws that we have written on our hearts which we violate every day, God because of His perfect justice will judge sin. There is no sin that will go unjudged. But because of His love for us and because of His boundless grace and compassion God has made a way to forgive sin and the sinner being saved, but only at the cost of the death of His own Son to pay for our crimes. Jesus has died and rose again to pay for our sins, to satisfy God's law, and now He offers a way of forgiveness that is free for all. Because none are good enough the offer of salvation must be free. He invites all to forsake sin and trust in His crosswork as a sufficient payment for their sins. We must leave our best deeds and our worst and cling to Christ alone for salvation. You can do this by praying, and asking God to forgive you, to have mercy upon and to accept you as His child. And if you do, He will receive you.

But then what? Then you should speak to the elders of the church tell them what you have done, and they will ask you a few question to see that you have understood the gospel. Then the next thing is that you should be baptised in open identification with Christ and His church. But that is not the end it is the beginning. You then need to join a local church in order to taught all Christ's commands, this includes the commandment of baptism, of regularly remembering His death for us at the Lord's table, of giving to support the needy and the spread of the gospel, to pray and have fellowship with one another, to bear one another's burdens and be accountable to spiritual leaders who will shepherd you. This is God's will for sinners, not merely to get forgiveness of sin but to be added to a church where they can serve and be served and grow in strength and with a united witness glorify God.

### **Churches make missionaries**

So here is our definition of the Great Commission, planting local churches all over the world. How is it then that the local church fulfils the Great Commission. We have shown how the church is the place where disciples are properly made, but how does the church fulfil the Great Commission? Isn't it only missionaries or evangelists who are the ones who fulfil the Great Commission? The local church is the heart that pumps lifeblood into missions. It is not the job of the parachurch organisation to fulfil the Great Commission but the job of every local church. The missions board of any denomination is not the one tasked with fulfilling the great commission but the local church. The various missions organisations that we are familiar with be they NTM, OMF, AIM, or One Mission are all merely partners with expertise who can aid the church, but they are not the lifeblood of missions, the local church is. Their job is to advise, equip, and have specialised expertise beyond the ability of our local churches, but we are the driving force not them. Paul expected the local churches he

planted to do the work of evangelising the areas they were planted in. So how do local churches fulfil the Great Commission?

There is fulfilling the great commission abroad where we seek to reach other cultures with the gospel and there is fulfilling it at home where we do local outreach. Lets focus on cross cultural missions. The work of missions is divided into two parts, those who go into the mission field and those who support. Those who are sent and the sending church or churches. Those who go down into the well and those who hold the rope.

Let us think on some of the things the supporting church does in the missionary endeavour. The local church is place from which the missionary must be sourced. They are identified, nourished, enabled and sent by a local church. Even the great apostle Paul, although he had a call from God by a vision of Christ being hand picked to be the apostle to the Gentiles, he had to be sent and supported by a local church. Acts 13:1-3, 'Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.<sup>2</sup> While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."<sup>3</sup> Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.' Here is a local church with a desire for missions, they are praying and seeking God's will. They had apostles and prophets present on their eldership and they were miraculously told who to set apart for missions, Paul and Barnabas. No doubt these men would have been the most gifted in the leadership team, but this church was willing to send its best to the field, not the dregs. Paul even though called by God did not go apart from the church but from it. This is vital.

The church plays a very important role in confirming the call of missionary. When someone is going to go into full time ministry we talk about it in terms of a call. This is language borrowed from the way the prophets were called and set apart by God. It in no way seeks to intimate that we have as miraculous and certified a claim as Paul, but it does seek to stress that God is at work in setting a person apart. A call to full time ministry is broken down into two parts, we speak about the internal call and the external call. The internal call is a desire to preach the gospel to the lost, it consists of teaching gifts and other gifts fitting one to go and if necessary suffer for Christ. A sense of call is a tricky thing to define and is experienced differently. For some it is an overwhelming desire for a particular group of people. For some it is a deep love for the church and wanting to see her served. For me it was a desire to serve the God who saved me and evangelise. This call is confirmed through the gifts that God gives, teaching gift in baby form is seen in a hunger for knowledge, an evangelistic gift is not measured by speaking ability but a desire to answer questions that unbelievers ask; it is also confirmed by the opportunities He providentially arranges, blessing on your service and the confirmation from other more mature people in the church that you have the gifts necessary to a call. To follow the Lord into the ministry following an inward call apart from the confirmation of the church is to be self-appointed not sent. As with Paul all full time ministry begins with service in the local church. It is in the local church that the young man has older mentors to guide him, opportunities for varying degrees of service, opportunities for trying out various forms of ministry, is accountable, will be prayed for and be ministered to.

If we were sending a church planter, we will be looking for someone who has the gifts of an elder. For we are not only looking for someone who can evangelise well but someone who can be a pastor, remember Paul planted local churches as they way of fulfilling the Great Commission.

Many people have a desire to serve God and think they may have a calling to full time ministry. This is where the church is so important. The external call is when the church

confirms your call and giftings. The church is the place where others can see your desire, your obedience and your gifts for service. If the church looks at your life and service and agrees with you that you are called, we call this the external call and it agrees with your own desires. Of course there are situations where others see your calling before you do, or there are churches who because of bias cannot see your calling, but ideally these things work together. The missionary agency is also helpful and can play a part in aiding the church test a person's call.

Like the church at Antioch once a person is deemed called the church takes the responsibility to send someone to the field. They have been tested as a servant and member of the church and when sent they are seen as a working member of the church who will continue to be supported by the sending church. This is vital. Too often missionaries have gone to the field to be forgotten. If the sending church fulfils its responsibilities properly they will own their missionaries as members who are abroad and pray and minister to them appropriately. In this way the missionary has many needs met through a considerate sending church. The challenges of the field are many but a thoughtful sending church can lighten the load.

Support comes in many forms. There is of course the financial support where all in the church give of their earnings to see the gospel advance. There is also the support of prayer. But there are other forms of support as well. Letter writings, the sending of gifts like books and DVDs, the remembering of birthdays and anniversaries, and providing furloughs and making sure they are looked after when on home assignment. Support must include not only supporting them when on the field but also when they are involved in their theological studies and preparations for the field. Opportunities for service in the local church as preparation are also essential.

Listen to Romans 10:14-15, 'How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"' I have a question that is raised from verse 15. It says how are they to preach unless they are sent. Who does the sending? Is Paul talking about God sending out preachers or is this talking about the church? The answer is yes. God sends us by way of the church not apart from it. This was how Paul was sent, this was how Barnabas was sent when the church at Antioch first began. We live in an age where people are self-appointed they have ministries and blogs and books all promoting their individual ministry, but intends for the church to be the sending agent. We are not self-appointed, and if the church does not recognise our gifts and will not send us then this is a message to you that you are not called as you think and you should seek to serve in another capacity.

So this is how Paul fulfils the Great Commission. He plants churches, and when those churches are faithful they will infiltrate their area with the gospel. Are we being faithful to this end?