**Romans 15:14-24**

I. Paul’s Ministry: an overview

A. A minister of Jesus to the Gentiles (v. 16)

B. Proclaiming the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum (v. 19)

1. Over the course of about 10 years, Paul embarked on three missionary journeys around the Mediterranean area

2. This was literally world changing ministry

II. Paul’s ministry as an “ambition” (v. 20)

A. The content of this ambition = “to preach gospel where Christ was not known “

1. Paul’s calling was to be a pioneer evangelist bringing the gospel to new areas

2. Paul laid the foundation and didn’t want to build on a foundation that other evangelists had already laid (v. 20)

3. His plan was to ultimately go to Spain via Rome to preach the gospel in new areas (v. 23)

4. This ambition came from both his encounter with the Risen Lord and his careful reflection on Scripture (see v. 21 where he quotes from Isaiah 52:15 and applies it to his own ministry)

B. It’s interesting that he calls this an “ambition”

Normally, ambition is a word with a negative connotation (as in selfish ambition), but here we see that there is such a thing as a godly ambition. God may plant a deep passion and ambition in someone’s heart for a particular ministry.

C. Consider what kinds of trouble this ambition got him into

See 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 and Acts 14:19-20

D. Consider what kinds of things this ambition kept him from doing

1. It kept him from visiting the Romans for many years even though selfishly he would have loved to do that (v. 22 and 23)

2. It may have kept him from other selfish desires (marrying, raising a family, etc.)

III. Paul’s Ministry as an “offering” (v. 16)

A. Paul compares his ministry to that of the priest who offers a sacrifice that is pleasing to God

1. Paul’s offering is the Gentiles themselves to whom he has preached the gospel.

2. He offers them to God as something that he hopes will please God

B. This gets at Paul’s motivation in ministry

1. There’s a danger in “ambition”: it can easily become selfish ambition so that a person is doing ministry to feed their own ego (get attention, self-affirmation, etc.)

2. “Offering” is a helpful balance to ambition that shows us that Paul’s motives in this are pure and that he is only trying to please one person: God. He simply wants to offer

C. Paul calls us to the same motivation in our lives

Romans 12:1: offer yourselves as a sacrifice, living, holy, and acceptable to God

= Live out of a response of gratitude for God’s mercy, and live in such a way that we bring joy to God

D. Mother Teresa’s example

 “Let my life be something beautiful for God.”

IV. Paul’s ministry as a “glory” (v. 17-19)

A. “Glory” (v. 17) = something to boast in or put our confidence in

B. “Speaking of nothing but what Christ has accomplished in me” (v. 18)

As Paul looks back on his ministry and all his words and deeds and all the miracles and conversions, he realizes it was never about him; it was Jesus working in and through him

C. “Glory” takes it another level deeper than “offering”

1. Offering gets at the motivation, but glory gets at the source and the strength behind our ministry

2. Glory takes it from doing things FOR God to doing things FROM God (or, to put it another way, God doing things THROUGH us)

a. In doing things FOR God, there is still the danger that we will see ourselves as working for God but do that in our own strength and resources and eventually burn out and get resentful

b. In God doing things THROUGH us, ministry is sustainable because we are in a constant state of dependence and surrender

c. Consider Paul’s example in Galatians: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.”

D. Mother Teresa’s example how able to sustain that ministry for so long

“I'm a little pencil in the hand of a writing God, who is sending a love letter to the world.”

V. Our Response Today

A. Perhaps God is placing a godly ambition in your heart for a particular need or ministry

1. Step out and follow that ambition even if that godly ambition might get you into trials or hassles you’d selfishly like to avoid.

2. Step out and follow that ambition even if that godly ambition might prevent you from doing things you’d selfishly like to do

a. So often we are prevented from doing things for God because other worldly things get in the way (busyness, hobbies, etc.)

b. It would be great if we could reverse that, so that our godly ambitions had first place so that they were getting in the way of more worldly things

B. Perhaps you want to offer God a particular aspect of your life as an offering that would be pleasing to him

1. “Offering” reminds us that we don’t need to move to another country or start a new ministry to be faithful to God. We can take the ordinary, daily, life we are living and offer God the ordinary, mundane tasks of our day to him as an offering

2. Col 3:17: “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”

C. Perhaps you want to boast in Christ alone in some area of your life

1. Maybe there’s an area of your Christian life where you’ve been trying so hard in your own strength and feel tired and burned out and need to surrender to God and depend on his strength and grace

2. Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are burdened, and I will give you rest.”

**Discussion Questions**

1. As you considered Paul’s life and ministry on Sunday, was there anything in particular that struck you or inspired you or challenged you by his example?

2. As you consider Paul’s example of godly ambition, do you find God stirring in your own heart at this time and giving you a passion for a particular ministry or opening your eyes to a particular need in a fresh way?

3. Paul’s godly ambition got him into all sorts of trouble, and it also prevented him from doing things he would have selfishly loved to do. Consider pursuing a godly ambition in your own life: what trials might that bring into your life and/or what things might that prevent you from doing that you’d selfishly like to be able to do?

4. On Sunday we talked about the idea that an “offering” doesn’t have to involve us moving to a new country or starting a new ministry; it can involve the ordinary, daily events of our lives. What makes something an offering to God? What, in your mind, is the core difference between doing something in a way that it is an offering to God vs. doing something in a way that it is not an offering to God. Choose an example (such as work or parenting, etc.) and discuss.

5. Is there any area of your life you want to present as an offering to God at this time?

6. In reference to v. 17-18, the following statement was made: “Here Paul takes it from doing things FOR God to doing things FROM God.” Discuss the difference between those two postures, and share any examples you may have from your own life.