THE PRIESTLY DUTY TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL

Romans 15:14-33

Key Verse: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.”

In this passage, Paul shared his mission, his vison, his plan and his prayer topics. In doing so, the Roman church might participate in God’s world mission work. The church is God’s mission to a lost world. At that time, the church at Rome was a small Christian community. The believers seemed to be struggling just to survive as immigrants. Paul wanted them to have a sense of God’s mission. As we consider Paul’s vision and plan, may we renew our calling and vision and live as faithful gospel workers through this passage.

1.Priestly duty (14-19)

Look at verse 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.”** Paul encouraged Roman believers that they were good, knowledgeable and competent! He complemented their good points. Paul recognized the spiritual maturity of the saints in Rome. But they had one spiritual weakness. In their struggle to maintain their faith in the vortex of the Empire, the world mission vision had become weak. So Paul wrote to remind them of what they already knew, the gospel and God’s world mission purpose.

Verse 16 says, **“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.”** This verse is filled with the languages of old Testament such as the words like priestly duty, offering and sanctified. In the Old Testament, a priestly duty belonged to the Levites. God provided a way for sinners to come to him and be forgiven through priest’s role as a bridge so that he might come and dwell in their midst. A priest is a mediator between God and man. He brings men to God and God to men. He studies God’s word and teaches it to the people.

When the nation of Israel was born in the desert of Sinai, just after the Exodus from Egypt, God told them his purpose for them, God said, **you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”** (Ex 19:5,6a) God chose Israel because he wanted them to be a kingdom of priests. He wanted them to be trained in obedience to God’s word and to reach out to all the nations of the world to bring them back to God. The people of Israel received God’s blessings and privileges, but they kept them and enjoyed them for themselves and their families. Instead, they became proud and despised the Gentiles. Furthermore, they adopted many of pagan ways and cultures. God disciplined them until a remnant survived spiritually. Through the remnant, God continued to work.

Priests had many duties. The outstanding duty was to offer sacrifices on the altar for the sins of the people. God accepted these sacrifices and forgave the sins of the Israelites. But these sacrifices were temporary. They looked forward to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Christ died once and for all as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus himself became our perfect sacrifice. In this way, Jesus ended animal sacrifice for sinners to come God. Jesus is the our Great High Priest. He is constantly interceding for us before the throne of God in heaven. He is the mediator between God and man. We can come to God directly through Jesus and receive the forgiveness of sins and have fellowship with God.

Paul regarded his ministry in the same function. We can picture him offering sacrifices to God daily. The Gentiles were an offering acceptable to God. How did he make the Gentiles to become acceptable offerings to God? He didn’t stand beside the altar with bloody hands. According to Romans 1:5, it was to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. He taught them to obey God by faith. Paul says that proclaiming the gospel of God to the Gentile is a priestly duty. The gospel is the good news that Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead by the power of God. Through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, we are forgiven. When we accept this gospel for ourselves, our sins are washed away and we are made new, our relationship with God is made right.

God raised a new people of God through Jesus. Peter writes about the church. 1 Peter 2:9 says, **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”** Believers in church became new Israelites. Their new identities are royal priesthood and a holy nation. The Risen Jesus met Paul and appointed him to be a missionary to the Gentiles so that he might fulfill God’s purpose for Israel and for the church to be a kingdom of priests. So Paul saw his calling and work as a priestly duty. There is another aspect of the priestly duty. It is to pray. The priest carried the Israelites before God in prayer. Likewise, Christians are to be prayer servants for the peoples of the world. Through intercessory prayer, we bring unbelieving people to God.

Many Jews opposed Paul his ministry. But nothing discouraged him because it was God’s command and God’s work. Scripture supported it. The Spirit of God himself confirmed it. God had blessed his ministry and made it fruitful. Paul saw men’s lives changed because God had worked in men’s hearts. In today’s term, to be a minister of Christ Jesus with the priestly duty means that we become shepherds for people and grow spiritually through the word of God and pray for them. All Christians have divine duty as royal priests to spread the gospel wherever they are and to whomever they meet. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to be small priests who can bring an acceptable offering to God. It is not an animal sacrifice, but changed people through the gospel.

My life goal before meeting Jesus was to be a good son to my parents and please them. For this purpose, I would get a decent job after studying hard, meet a good wife and live a noble life. I cherished my petty dream. But I suffered from meaninglessness, loneliness and a sense of inferiority. God heard my miserable cry and sent me a bible teacher through whom I met Jesus and found the truth that I had earnestly searched for. Since then on, God has led my life to live as a shepherd, bible teacher and prayer servant for people around me. My life path has been quite different from my old friends. But I am convinced that this life as a priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God is the most meaningful life. I praise God for his calling me out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Look at verses 17,18, **“Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentile to obey God by what I have said and done.”** Paul considered his mission life as glorious. He gloried Christ through his ministry. He recognized that it was Christ who worked through him to minister to the Gentiles. When Paul obeyed Christ as his servant, Christ worked powerfully through Paul’s words and deeds to lead the Gentiles to obey God. Paul had been a mighty instrument of God’s power. But Paul always pointed people to Jesus and gave glory to God. Paul led people to a life of obedience. Disobedience to God brought sin and death. On the other hand, when we obey God, life and blessing overflow and our relationship with him blossoms.

Verse 19 says, **“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.”** When Paul obeyed Christ, God blessed his ministry by working through the power of the Spirit to perform signs and wonders. So he preached the gospel powerfully from Jerusalem all the way around Illyricum which is Albania in modern day.

We thank God for blessing our meeting with P.Ron Ward and 3 other guests last Thursday. Among the guests, I had a chance to hear M.David Kim’s mission life story the following day. M.David Kim was a gym teacher and M.Joy Kim was a nurse in Korea. M.Daivd and Joy Kim came to LA UBF as the first mission field and moved to Chicago and then Dupage later receiving all kinds of spiritual trainings especially humble dead dog training. In the midst of God’s blessing in serving ministry in Du Page ministry as well as their two daughters to live independent lives through marriages, God continually began to ask him what kind of lives he want to live. Then they realized that there is no UBF in Indianapolis. Suddenly, he felt the burden of responsibility. He also found that he had a hidden desire to live an easygoing life, managing their present ministry enjoying their future grandchildren. A few weeks later while having group bible study based on Acts 2:17, “**young men will see visions and old men will dream dreams**.” Then they realized that they were still young and full of vision. God helped him to make a bold decision to pioneer IUPUI, Indianapolis and Perdue university before being too late at the age of 54. God blessed his service to God there with many students and spiritual fruits. He said, there is no regret in my life.

The first prayer topic for our Canada UBF is as follows, “Canada to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation and evangelize all Canadian campuses.” May God bless each of us to find our identity as royal priesthood and live as bible teachers and praying people for campus students, family members, friends and colleagues.

2.Paul’s pioneering spirit and vision (20-33)

Look at verse 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.”** Paul has always been a man of ambition. In Christ, his ambition was sanctified by the word of God. Paul had a compelling passion to preach Christ where Christ was not known. This came from sharing God’s heart for the lost. God is does not want anyone to perish, but to come to salvation. Verse 23 says, “… **there is no more place for me to work in these regions**.” He was eager to visit Rome and share spiritual blessings with them. That was not the end. He planned to go to Spain which was regarded as the ends of the earth in Paul’s time. Paul kept pioneering spirit.

On last Friday, we visited Jerusalem, not in Israel, but a restaurant in Toronto. Dervilla Ward enjoyed Mediterranean food and said, “it is exciting and meaningful for her to have fellowship at Jerusalem restaurant in Toronto.” She said Acts 1:8, **“But 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.”** Gospel work starts right here in Toronto and expands to all other parts of Canada. Many responded saying “Amen.”

In verses 24-29, Paul shares his plan. Paul was writing from Corinth and was on his way to Jerusalem to deliver an offering from the Gentile churches. He called the Christians in Jerusalem **“the Lord’s people.”** They belonged to the Lord who bought them with his blood. They were suffering from severe poverty. Paul was concerned with their practical needs. So, he collected from the Gentile churches a contribution for the poor in Jerusalem. Paul found deep meaning in this offering. It gave the Gentile Christians an opportunity to give thanks to the Jews for the spiritual blessings they received through them. In receiving material help from the Gentiles, the Jews could acknowledge them as brothers and sisters in the Lord. It was a practical way for Jews and Gentiles to overcome the barrier between them and become one in Christ. Then they could glorify God. He wanted to bridge between the Gentile church and the Jewish believers. This offering was Paul’s prayer to unify Gentile and Jewish believers for the glory of God. Ultimately, Paul wanted to plan world mission vision in Jewish believers.

Look at verse 30. **“I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join in my struggle by praying to God for me.”** Paul knew the danger of his visit to Jerusalem. Paul says to join in my struggle by praying. NKJV says “**strive together with me**.” In fact, praying for others to agonize together.

His first prayer topics was that he might be kept safe in Judea. Many unbelieving Jews there hated Paul and planned to kill him on the way. Paul asked the Roman believers to pray for his safe journey in order to carry out his mission. Paul’s second prayer topic was that the contribution he carried would be favorably received by the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. He knew it was not easy for them to receive help from the Gentiles. Paul’s third prayer topic was that after delivering the offering, he might visit the Romans and be refreshed in their company. Paul considered the Roman believers his prayer partners and urged them to pray. Then he finished his letter with a blessing, **“The God of peace be with you all. Amen.”**

In today’s passage, we learned the priestly duty from apostle Paul. We must see ourselves in light of God’s hope and mission. We are priests in the sight of God who have a priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel to the people of all nations. May we carry out this duty faithfully and reveal God’s glory.