

Henry Ow
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HCC Sermon

The Unfinished Task of a Mission-Minded Church

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: During my early years of being a Christian, I always wondered why God would allow so many to perish because they haven't had the opportunity to hear the gospel.
2. Need: Many in the world have not had the opportunity to hear the gospel.
3. Subject: How does a mission minded church engage in the task of reaching the lost?
4. Text: Rom 15:14-24
5. Preview
 - a. What is the task of the church?
 - b. What does a mission minded church recognize?
 - c. How does a mission minded church engage in the unfinished task?

BODY

- I. The task of the church is to make disciples (15:14-17)
 - A. Paul devoted his life to make disciples among Gentiles (15:14-17)
 1. Paul reminded the Romans of how the gospel provided salvation to both Jew and Gentile
 2. Paul reminded the romans of how the gospel should transform their lives.
 - B. Continue to make disciples among whoever God brings into your life
 1. Share the gospel with the lost
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- II. A mission-minded church recognizes that the task is unfinished because unreached people exist (15:18-21)
 - A. Although Paul had planted strategic churches in the Eastern part of the Roman empire, parts in the west remained unreached.
 1. Paul recalls his successful ministry in the East (15:18-19)
 2. Paul reveals his ambition to plant churches where no Christians exist (15:20-21)
 - B. Learn more about the unfinished task of reaching the unreached.
- III. A mission-minded church engages in the unfinished task by supporting work to the unreached (15:22-24)
 - A. Paul requests that Roman churches support his work to the unreached in the western part of the Roman empire (15:22-24)
 - B. Participate in the church's work to support taking the gospel to the unreached.

CONCLUSION

1. Summary: A mission-minded church engages in the unfinished task by supporting work to the unreached (15:22-24)

2. Closing Image: J.O. Fraser knew of the importance of receiving the church's support to shares the gospel with the Lisu.

MANUSCRIPT

During my early years of being a Christian, I always wondered why God would allow so many to perish because they haven't had the opportunity to hear the gospel. It seemed unfair that people in places like Africa or Asia would be condemned to hell. I mean it's one thing for those who hear the gospel and say: "No thanks" versus those who live on some remote island without any chance to hear the gospel. This thought troubled me because God seemed biased. He would save those who had a chance to hear the gospel while allowing those who had no opportunity to perish.

Many in the world have not had the opportunity to hear the gospel. Per the website, Joshua Project, 42.5% of the world's population remains unreached. Many of these people live in an area that we call the 10-40 window. If you look at a globe, there are two types of lines. The first sets of lines go north and south. They're the longitudinal lines. There are then the lines that go east to west. These are considered latitudinal lines. The 10-40 window refers to the region between the latitude line 10 and latitudinal line 40. The 10-40 includes areas such as northern Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Many of you have probably heard of this region.

But have you guys heard of the porthole within the 10-40 window? The Porthole within the 10-40 window is where there is the greatest concentration of unreached within the 10-40 window. The porthole would be over the area of southeast Asia. Why would I say that? Let's think about of population. Which country has the largest population? China. Which country has the second largest population? India. Both countries are in Southeast Asia. Which country has the largest Muslim population? You may be tempted to answer a country in the Middle East or North Africa. But it's the country: Indonesia. It is also in Southeast Asia. If you were to call out

the major non-Christian faiths. What would they be? I use the acronym thumb to help me remember. Tribal. Hindu. Unreligious. Muslim. Buddhist. The largest percentage of Hindus live in India. One of the largest Buddhist nations, Thailand, is also in Southeast Asia. All these worldviews are found in southeast Asia. If we had to answer: “Where do most of the unreached live?” The answer would be Southeast Asia. There are a lot of unreached in the world. A majority of them are concentrated in southeast Asia.

How did I eventually resolve the question: “Why does God allow so many to perish without giving them the opportunity to hear the gospel”? During college, I had the opportunity to take Perspectives at a local church. I learned that God was a missionary God. He desired for people from all nations to know Him. To make himself known, he used the nation of Israel. But when Israel failed in its witness to the nations, he sent them into exile. Jesus came to witness to the nations and after his death, resurrection, and ascension, he entrusted the task to his followers. The church. So how does God plan to reach the unreached? The church.

Why are we talking so much about reaching the unreached? It’s because we’re considering this morning the question: “How does a mission-minded church engage in the task of reaching the unreached?” Now you may be thinking I thought our sermon series is addressing different aspects of our vision. Our vision is to be an urban Chinese-heritage church that reaches all those in our lives, Chinese or otherwise, in central Houston through equipping, sending, and church planting. But there’s nothing in that statement that talks about reaching out to the unreached. That’s because it’s hidden in the word: send. To fulfil the vision of our church, we aspire to send workers into these harvest fields of unreached people in the world to share the gospel and establish churches. But how do we do this? How does a mission-minded

church do this? How does a mission-minded church engage in the task of reaching the unreached?

To answer this question, we'll turn to the writings of an early missionary, pastor, and apostle. Paul. We'll look specifically at his letter to the Roman church. We'll be in Romans, chapter 15. Romans, chapter 15. Thank You, Dena, for reading this morning's passage.

Some people describe the Paul's letter to the Romans as a support letter. He writes to the Roman church to prepare for his visit. After spending some time with them, Paul expected them to send him off to do ministry in Spain. But the letter also addressed an issue within the church. Gentiles and Jews within the church had trouble getting along. He explained how the gospel transformed how they interacted with one another. If they believed in the same gospel, then he anticipated their support. Again, we'll be in Romans, chapter 15.

In this morning's passage, we'll be answering three questions. First question, what is the task of the church? What is the job of the church? Second question. What does a mission-minded church recognize? What is a mission-minded church aware of? Third question. How does a mission-minded church engage in the unfinished task? What does a mission church do to work on the unfinished task?

Let's tackle the first question. What is the task of the church? **The task of the church is to make disciples.** The church has the responsibility of helping people become followers of Christ. We not just have the responsibility of sharing the gospel with the lost but also helping believers to grow in Christlikeness. **The task of the church is to make disciples.**

We see this lived out in the life of Paul. **Paul devoted his life to make disciples among the Gentiles.** Although Paul was Jew, he spent most of his life sharing the gospel with non-Jews.

One might say that was his God-given task. Even at his conversion, God told Ananias that Paul would be his chosen instrument to carry out the gospel to the Gentiles. He repeats this point in the first few verses of our passage this morning. Look at verse 14. *I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace give me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In Christ Jesus, I have reason to be proud of my work for God.*

Since Paul recognized his role to make disciples of Christ among the Gentiles, he had to remind the Gentiles of some gospel truths. He highlights his unique role in verse 16. *To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God.* The Roman church needed to be reminded of certain aspects of the gospel. That's why Paul writes earlier in verse 15. *But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder because of the grace given me by God.*

This prompts us to ask: What did Paul need to remind the Romans about? What are points of the gospel that Paul wanted to highlight. If you read through the letter of Romans, then you'll notice two themes.

First, **Paul reminded the Roman church of how the gospel provides salvation for both Jew and Gentiles.** Yes, the Jews had the Mosaic law. But they were lost in sin. The Gentiles didn't have the law, but they were lost in sin too because they worshiped creation rather than the creator. Gentiles broke the law written upon their hearts. Both groups of people had sinned and were under God's wrath. But God saved both groups through grace by faith. Just as

Abraham was justified by faith, both Jew and Gentile would be justified by faith in Christ's work. Paul then explains how their identity changed from being under the authority of sin to being under the authority of God. The Jews were not better than the Gentiles because they had the Mosaic law. Both Jew and Gentile saved by grace through faith. Discipleship begins when a person realizes that they are saved by grace through faith.

The second idea, **Paul highlights is transformation**. Paul reminded the Roman church of how the gospel should transform their lives. Instead of offering sacrifices at the temple, they would offer their transformed lives as a sacrifice to God. Paul alludes to this in the latter half of verse 16. *So that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.* This means that followers of Christ live under the authority of the Holy Spirit rather than their own selfish desires.

If Paul's aspiration was to make disciples among the Gentiles, then it should be our desire as well. As a church, it should be our goal to make disciples. That's why the vision statement states: to reach all those in our lives, Chinese or otherwise. **Continue to make disciples among whoever God brings into your life.**

Share the gospel with the lost. This requires us to spend time with the lost. It could be our lost co-workers. It could be our classmates. It might be unbelieving parents at your child's baseball game. It might be the lost that you see at the local gym. To share the gospel with the lost begins with spending time with them. As you spend time with them, look for opportunities to share the gospel with them.

Making disciples means evangelism. But it also means walking with other believers. **Encourage other believers.** Jonathan already covered this idea of discipling others, so that they

would be self-replicating disciples. What you have learned in your faith, pass onto others so that they may pass it on to others.

Now you may be wondering: why are you wasting our time talking about things we already know? Well... I guess if Paul could write things in a way of reminder, then I could remind you of things you already know. But you should have been wondering: If the task of a church is to make disciples, then what does this have to do with reaching the unreached?

That brings us to the second question. What does a mission-minded church recognize? What is a mission-minded church aware of?

A mission-minded church recognizes that the task is unfinished because unreached people exist. A church, who cares about missions, understands that there are unreached people out there that need to hear about the gospel. A mission minded church is aware of the need to take the gospel to the unreached. **A mission-minded church recognizes that the task of making disciples is unfinished because unreached people exist.**

Now all churches may be carrying out the task of making disciples. Not all churches are mission minded. What do I mean? To answer this question requires us to understand what the word mission means. The word: missions has been a buzz word to describe all kinds of things. Missions is working with the marginalized in our city. When you leave the parking lot of our church when you turn right onto main street, you'll see a faded sign: you are entering into the mission field. Some call the mission field your workplace or your school. It seems like every type of Christian ministry can be labeled with the adjective: missional.

I understand the sentiment. But when I use the word mission this morning, I'm referring to the task of proclaiming the gospel to an unreached people group with a culture different

than yours to establish churches that will evangelize those within their culture and disciple them, so that they would send out missionaries. This means missions includes a cross-cultural component. To do missions requires a believer to cross cultures to share the gospel.

This means that a mission-minded church thinks about how it will take the gospel to a people group who has a different set of world views. But what would make a people group unreached? There have been many definitions for an unreached people group. Here is one from group of mission leaders: “An unreached people group refers to a people group within which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians to evangelize this people group.” The primary element that defines whether a people group is unreached is if there is healthy church within it evangelizing the lost. The unfinished task then refers to making disciples among these unreached people groups, so that an indigenous community of Christians, the church, would be able to share the gospel with members of their people group.

Paul recognized the task of taking the gospel to unreached people groups. **Although Paul had planted strategic churches in the Eastern part of the Roman empire, parts in the west remained unreached.** We see Paul reflecting on his church planting work in Romans, chapter 15. First, Paul recalls his successful ministry in the eastern part of the empire. Look at verse 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, 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.*

Paul recalls how he ministered in the East. He preached the gospel. He lived among the people in different communities like Philippi, Thessalonica, and Ephesus to show what a life

transformed by the gospel looked like. He also did miraculous works such as casting out evil spirits. He healed the lame (Acts 14:8-18). He did all of this by the power of the Holy Spirit.

He also notes two locations. First, he notes the city of Jerusalem where the church began at the day of Pentecost. From there the gospel traveled westward to an area northwest of present-day Greece called Illyricum. This represents the Eastern area of the Roman Empire.

At the end of the section I just read, Paul says that he has fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ in this area. Does that mean everyone in that region of the Roman empire has been evangelized? That would be an audacious claim. It's probably more accurate to say that Paul had planted churches with faithful leaders who would continue the task of sharing the gospel with the lost in those regions.

Paul then sets his sights to places where there are no churches. **He reveals his ambition to plant churches where no Christians or churches exist.** Look at verse 20. *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."*

Paul bases his ambition to preach in places where no gospel has been preached from a passage in the book of Isaiah. Verse 21 is a citation from Isaiah, chapter 52, verse 15. Isaiah chapter 52 is a servant song talking about how the servant king will die for the transgressions of man. This news would then be taken to the nations. Paul sees himself as fulfilling this prophetic text by going to places where there is no gospel witness. He recognizes that the task of reaching the unreached remains unfinished. This prompts him to engage in this task.

The task of taking the gospel to the unreached remains even today. There are over seven thousand people groups in the world that lack a gospel witness. If we are to be a mission-minded church, then we need to recognize the unfinished task of taking the gospel to the unreached. This means we need to **learn more about unfinished task of reaching the unreached**. How might we do this? When missionaries return from furlough, attend their sharing. Hear about the work that they're doing among their people group especially if they are unreached. Invite these missionaries who are on home assignment to your small group gatherings and fellowship meetings. You can utilize websites such as Joshua Project or Operation World to learn about the unreached. If there's an opportunity, then you might want to consider taking the Perspectives course. The leaders of our church hope that all our members would know of the unfinished task of reaching the unreached.

Is it enough just to learn about the unreached? Is it enough to recognize the importance of participating in the unfinished task? Nope. This brings us to the last question. How does a mission minded church engage in the unfinished task? What might we be able to do to support the work of bring the gospel to the unreached?

A mission-minded church engaged in the unfinished task by supporting working to the unreached. A church that has a focus on reaching the unreached will find ways to support such work. They look for opportunities to invest their time, resources, and prayer to this task of seeing the unreached reached. **A mission-minded church engages in the unfinished task by supporting work to the unreached.**

We see Paul ask for the support of the Roman church in this morning's passage. **He requests that the Roman church support his work to the unreached in Spain.** Look at verse 22.

This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 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, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

Paul had intended to go to Spain through Rome earlier. But ministry in the East preoccupied his time. When the issue of whether circumcision was required of Gentiles came up, it required him to return to Jerusalem to attend a council meeting. Imprisonments, shipwrecks, and beatings also may have caused him to delay. But Paul still expresses his intention to go to Spain through Rome.

Note Paul's expectation. He hopes to receive help. Look at verse 24. *To be helped on my journey there by you.* The word help here in the Greek is used often in the context of receiving material help such as food, shelter, or finances. Paul is not so subtle in citing his expectation to receive help from the Roman church so that he might go minister in Spain. But before receiving such help, he expects to spend some time with them. Look again at verse 24. *Once I have enjoyed your company for a while.* Paul understands the importance of relationship before receiving support.

What does this mean for us as a church? One aspect of our vision is to plant out sustainable churches. This means that we continue to evangelize the city of Houston through church planting. But we also hope to be part of working to establish healthy churches within unreached people groups. This means participating in the church's work to support taking the gospel to the unreached. This is a work that we're already doing.

For instance, we have missionaries serving in different areas of the world. We think of one family who serves in Thailand seeking to reach the lost there. Others hope also to go to Thailand to establish healthy churches there too. Another is hoping to go to Indonesia to serve with a team to reach an unreached people group in Indonesia. We hope that God would raise up more people within our church to go to unreached people groups to establish churches there.

How do we help to support their work? Let me read you some of the ways a missionary, Josephine and I know, wrote.

1. Email with follow up questions from newsletters. (You won't be bothering us)
2. E-cards, or a video message for any holiday, birthday, anniversary. (Christmas cards!)
3. Download a messaging app to easily stay in touch (WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram).
4. Stay in touch by telling us what you are up to. Send us pictures of you, your kids, your kitty, your painting project, etc.
5. Pray for us and then tell us you did or what you prayed for.
6. Give a book you thought was really meaningful, a movie you liked for a family movie night, or a worship song or album you love through the internet (send a gift download through Amazon).
7. Tell your friends about our ministry.
8. Ask good intentional questions (check in on us), missionaries need to be checked on too, maybe especially.
9. Share what God is doing in your life, or a Bible passage he's used in your life recently.
10. Come for a visit.

Maybe you can think of doing one thing from this list for a missionary this week. I'm sure that they would appreciate it.

This morning, we took some time to think about how a mission-minded church would engage in the unfinished task of reaching the unreached? First, we have to understand the task of the church. Make disciples. Second, we need to recognize the unfinished task. Unreached people exist that need to hear the gospel. Third, how do we engage in the unfinished task of reaching the unreached? Support work to the unreached.

To close this morning's message, I wanted to share with you something that missionary J.O. Fraser wrote to his supporters back home. J.O. Fraser served as a pioneer missionary with OMF to the Lisu people and ethnic minority group in southwest China. As he worked among the Lisu people he wrote:

They (referring to the Lisu) have not yet grown to military age in this spiritual warfare; they are babes in God's nursery, not warriors in God's army. But you (referring to his supporters) have centuries of Christianity behind you. You have had Christian education, Christian influence, an open Bible, devotional helps, and many other things to help you in your growth to spiritual maturity. (Put in present day language. You have Biblegateway.com. The Gospel Coalition. Right Now Media. Sunday School. Small group gatherings) So now you belong to those of full stature in Christ, who are able to "help... with power against the enemy." The vast difference between you and them is that you are "grown up" in Christ, while they are babes and sucklings; and the work of pulling down Satan's strongholds requires strong men, not infants. (Here comes his request. He wants to remind his supporters that they are not just players on a bench. He continues.) I am trying to roll the main responsibility of this prayer-

warfare on you. I want you to take the burden of these people upon your shoulders, I want you to wrestle with God for them.

Because of J.O. Fraser's faithful work amongst the Lisu, many Lisu came to faith in Christ. They established a church that now sends missionaries to surrounding areas. This once unreached people group is now 45% Evangelical Christian. Fraser would contend that it wasn't just through his work alone, but it required the prayers of his supporters at home. May the Lord help us as a church to engage in the unfinished task of taking the gospel to the unreached.