

Outward Bound!

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Romans 15

18 For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed,

19 Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

20 Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation:

21 But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand.

22 For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you.

23 But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you;

24 Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company,

In translating the Epistle to the Romans for the benefit of natives converted to God from heathenism, its beauty and largeness have been more impressed upon me than ever.

Not to speak now of the early chapters with all their importance for our souls' establishment in grace, there are some excellent considerations at the end, which show the spirit and faith of the great vessel, whom God chose to be His servant to minister Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. I refer to the Apostle Paul, and to his communications by the Spirit in the fifteenth chapter.

It is a peculiar feature of the present dispensation that God has set aside all national or hereditary religion, as exemplified in His chosen nation of Israel (and no other nation is ever spoken of in Scripture as His chosen), in favour of the testimony which embraces all the Gentiles, that is, every nation and tribe under the sun.

Accordingly the Apostle, in fellowship with the heart and with the purpose of God, took first the whole region from Jerusalem to Illyricum as his parish, and fully preached the gospel of Christ. To our Lilliputian minds it seems almost incredible (see the map of Paul's travels and the area involved); but in all his labours the power of the Spirit of God was with him. Hence souls were everywhere brought to the knowledge of God revealed in Christ Jesus the Lord assemblies were planted and watered, the mystery of the gospel was communicated.

The measure of saints' intelligence and faith everywhere varied, and we might suppose that this great vessel would now surrender the evangelistic side of his work to younger men, and devote himself to pastoral and teaching labours in the meetings already formed. Such might have been the human expedient, but it was not the Divine mode, in regard of *his* service. As long as there remained any part in that district in which Christ had not been named, he felt that there was not only a justification for his

working in it, but a call to take the gospel there; yet at the time of writing he felt that the ways of God took him onward. "Having no more place in these parts" was, for him, the loosening of the tether that bound him to them.

Now Rome and Italy were next in order as his thoughts went westward. But since at Rome was a large and prosperous assembly at the time, he did not regard that place as a terminus by any means; on the contrary, his thoughts went on to regions beyond them. He would spend time with them truly, and would impart some spiritual gift that they might be established; but a deep yearning possessed him to launch out into the deep. Spain lay beyond; Spain in the grip of the enemy of the Lord whom he served; Spain where might be found other trophies of the saving grace of God, and other members of that body, of the truth as to which he was constituted minister.

But do notice the words, "*For which cause* also I have been much hindered from coming to you" (v. 22). For what cause? Because there still remained, up to the time just previous to the writing of the epistle, some towns where they had not heard of Christ. But once these were evangelised, Paul had no hesitation about leaving the assemblies with their local helpers in the care of the Lord and of His ever present Spirit, nor about plunging afresh into heathendom.

Does it not encourage and widen our hearts to read, "It is written, To whom He was not spoken of, **THEY SHALL SEE**; and they that have not heard **SHALL UNDERSTAND**? If we wish to be certain of converts to God, men who will both see and understand Him of whom the gospel speaks, we may look for them confidently among men who have not heard before, and to whom He was not spoken of before. It seems to me that the normal movement of a saint's heart must be forward. A steamer is built for forward movement. It is capable of navigating to the rear, for there may be some poor fellow, who falls overboard, to be picked up; or there may be occasional short-sightedness that nearly produces collision — and it is better to go astern a bit than to send one's fellow-navigators to the bottom; or it may be necessary to go backwards to get out of dock, or to get clear of other craft in harbour. But all this is abnormal, and the owners of the steamer would be very dissatisfied with their investment if she were not usually going full steam ahead on their business.

I understand this to have been the spirit of the Apostle. He could put into Ephesus, and stay there a long time at the Lord's will; he could linger over Galatians, who seemed like subjects for the lifebelt or the lifeboat rather than sturdy mariners for God; but his evident business from Jerusalem to Illyricum, and again from Illyricum to Spain, was "full steam ahead" to regions *where Christ was NOT NAMED*. This was the port of destination. Here is one of the notes in his log-book: "We are come as far as to you also in the gospel of Christ, . . . having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you, *according to our rule* abundantly, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you" (2 Cor. 10: 14-16). If he went to Rome as he planned, it is thus he speaks: "I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way *thitherward* by you" (Rom. 15: 24). Thitherward! *thitherward!! THITHERWARD!!!*

We are not apostles now; in fact, we are very poor witnesses of our Lord at best, and the state of the assembly calls for constant care and prayer; but I judge we shall very greatly help saints by cultivating the Apostle's spirit of active testimony to the Lord. Nine hundred and ninety in every thousand may be fixtures in their own localities by business ties and other lawful claims; but let our hearts go out *thitherward, thitherward*. Whither? To where Christ is not named.

I am convinced that largeness of heart in such lawful directions would preserve from much introspection, and from much striving about words to no profit. A sound, active frame, healthful and vigorous, throws off microbes, where a frame enfeebled by inactivity absorbs and assimilates them.

May the Lord enlarge our hearts.