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Sermon Notes

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The Purpose of Scripture: Teaching, Endurance, Encouragement, Hope, and Unity

Romans 15:4-6

Introduction: Fully Equipped

In order to go on a lengthy journey of any sort, it is imperative that you be fully equipped.

Every well-planned expedition has had to give careful thought to its equipment, to the supply for its people. They had to consider every possibility

Christopher Columbus: had a hold in which we stored what he felt was needed for the voyage to the far side of the globe

The ships carried enough provisions for a year, at a time when two weeks at sea was a long voyage. Supplies on board included foodstuffs, such as water, dried fish, salt meat, live pigs and hens (to be killed aboard ship), rice, cheese, and figs; navigational instruments, including nautical almanacs, charts, compasses, magnets, hourglasses, and rulers; and trade items, such as glass beads, brass rings, knitted caps, gold, silver, pearls, and spices

Lewis & Clark: their combined supplies included

Once he was named by President Thomas Jefferson to head the Corps of Discovery, Meriwether Lewis began preparations for the long trip ahead. Much of that preparation involved education; in the months prior to his departure, Lewis would learn astronomy, botany, navigation, medicine and biology, among other scientific disciplines. BUT ALSO...Lewis spent his time accumulating all the supplies that the expedition was going to need. He wrote list after list of provisions, which included guns, ammunition, medical supplies and scientific instruments. While still on the East Coast, Lewis accumulated almost two tons of goods using the \$2,500 Congress had allocated for the expedition

Space Shuttle: One mission is resupply of International Space Station; one resupply mission in 2004 involved 3,042 pounds of dry supplies and hardware; 1,521 pounds of propellant for the station's thrusters; about 926 pounds of potable water and 110 pounds of oxygen and air

So... for any important mission, careful thought needs to be given to the full supplies needed in order to complete that mission

In our passage today, we find some of the resources God has given to supply the church of Jesus Christ for its long journey through the world and through history

First, Scripture... from Scripture comes instruction... from instruction comes endurance and encouragement.... From these comes hope

From the same God also comes unity... one mind, one heart, praising and glorifying God with one mouth

Without these regenerating supplies, the church will not be able to make its astonishing journey from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, and from the first century to the end of time

Without these regenerating supplies, none of you will complete your own personal Christian journeys through the world

So many Christians suffer from spiritual discouragement

So many Christian churches suffer from disunity

This text provides the solution to both problems... and Scripture is the key to everything

Last week: we saw the obligation the strong Christians have to bear the failings of the weak:

Romans 15:1-3 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ² Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. ³ For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

Context: Rome

Roman church; mixed with Jew and Gentile

Struggling over "debatable issues"

Amazing: Paul gives almost a chapter and a half to this issue of strong and weak Christians, struggling over debatable issues

Reason: A Spirit-filled church that is happy in the gospel of grace, holy in resisting sin, and united in helping each other is the most powerful weapon on the face of the earth for the advancement of the gospel and the crushing of Satan's Evil Empire

Church at Rome:

Mixed church; Jews and Gentiles trying to make it together;

Paul desires the strong Christians to help the weak, and not allow anyone of Christ's precious ones to slip through the cracks

There they were in Rome... surrounded by all the pagan pomp and power of the Imperial City, surrounded by the old way of life in paganism, surrounded by everything the world had to offer

It would have been so easy for the fragile coalition of Jew and Gentile church to fragment and for pieces of the crumbling structure to fall away... for people to slip through the cracks and be lost to the church

Basic idea: Christian journey is a toilsome and difficult one; a very dangerous journey in which we can easily become discouraged and beaten down

One of the most vital ministries the Holy Spirit has for us is that of ENCOURAGEMENT... it is the power of the Holy Spirit to renew our souls, to refresh us and enable us to keep making progress in the internal and external journeys

Without encouragement, we will soon give up in the Christian journey

I. Ancient Scripture's Immediate Purpose

A. Doubting Ancient Scripture

1. Context: Why This Parenthesis?

- a. Paul has just quoted Psalm 69
- b. It is the 65th time Paul has quoted the Old Testament in Romans... he'll quote it six more times in Romans 15
- c. The allusion to Psalm 69 is a bit difficult, a bit obscure
- d. So it causes Paul to pause and comment on the purpose of Scripture... by that he means Old Testament Scripture

2. Satan's Ancient Work: Promoting Doubt in God's Word

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

3. Mixed Church at Rome: Gentiles Might Question Old Testament

- a. Perhaps the Gentiles would be tempted to minimize the Old Testament

- b. After all, it was the OT that gave us these now obsolete rules and regulations anyway
- c. It was the OT rules and regulations that excluded Gentiles
- d. So Paul addresses the lasting purpose of the OT: “**Everything that was written in the past...**”
- e. He says the OT was written for US, for we who would come later

4. Marcion

- a. Amazingly: within a century after Paul wrote these words, a heretic named Marcion started his own church in Rome!!
- b. Began his church in A.D. 144
- c. He held that the OT was the product of an evil, false god called a demiurge
- d. Especially despised the obsolete ceremonial laws... eating restrictions, etc.
- e. The very thing Paul was trying to stave off in the church of Rome happened! Gentiles despising the Old Testament
- f. The God of the NT was a God of light and of love
- g. The OT was to be rejected altogether... Christianity was to be cleansed of its Jewish connections
- h. He considered himself the successor to the Apostle Paul in his battle against the Judaizers and Jewish legalists... but he went way beyond Paul and rejected the OT scriptures themselves

5. Modern Attacks

- a. Many modern people have attacked the Old Testament as contradictory to the God of Jesus Christ
- b. People like Thomas Jefferson, Voltaire, Charles Darwin, Mahatma Gandhi, and Albert Einstein have expressed distaste for the God of the Old Testament and approval for the person of Christ as they conceive of Him
- c. Many modern people attack the possibility of reconciling these diverse views of God: His overwhelming wrath at Sodom and Gomorrah and His gentleness in Christ; His establishment of Old Covenant Judaism, and His planned obsolescence of it in the New Covenant

Paul here is defending ALL of Scripture as helpful to ALL CHRISTIANS

B. All Scripture Given for a Purpose

Romans 15:4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

1. God had a reason for writing it down
 - a. Scripture is no accident
 - b. Rather, Scripture plays an essential role in our salvation
2. Series of purpose statements
 - a. “to teach us”
 - b. “so that...”
 - c. “we might have hope”
3. Universally a gift
 - a. “whatever was written”
 - b. Universal statement of the purpose of Scripture
 - c. Similar to 2 Timothy 3:16
 - d. Inerrancy essential!!!
 - e. “Many times and various ways”
 - f. Genres
 - i) History
 - ii) Poetry
 - iii) Law
 - iv) Prophecy

C. God’s Intended Audience: all the elect throughout all time

1. God’s Promises to Abraham were not for him alone

Romans 4:23-24 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone,²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness-- for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

2. God's prophecies through David, Isaiah and Daniel were not for them alone

1 Peter 1:10-12 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

3. The writing is for US... so that we will be warned and encouraged, that we might have faith and obey

Matthew 22:31-32 But about the resurrection of the dead-- have you not read what God said to you, ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.'

4. Application must be done carefully, in context... BUT IT MUST BE DONE!!!

a. Not "what are the giants in your life?"

Some time ago, I became suspicious of the way most preachers handled texts of Scripture... reading a small portion, finding something that was relevant to everyday life and going directly to that application without consideration of context in any way

Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*. had a chapter entitled "Killed Any Good Giants Lately?"

In it he opposes the shortcut that some Bible teachers and pastors do with Old Testament historical stories... David and Goliath, for example

It's just too glib to say, "David killed Goliath. What are the giants in your life?"

It forgets the redemptive historical context, the fact that David was the Lord's Anointed and that Goliath was a Philistine who was trying to take the Promised Land from the Chosen People.

We tend to identify immediately with the hero David, seeking to be as courageous as he was. Goldsworthy says more likely we should find ourselves among the cowardly Israelites who were too afraid to face Goliath. Thus David is much more like Jesus, our champion, our hero, who goes out to fight in our place and wins the victory over Satan, hell, and death single-handedly.

b. But DO apply David and Goliath

Well, I absolutely believe that is true... and a right way to handle Scripture

But yet, we do have immense struggles in our lives, things that make us afraid, things that make us quail and we must find courage somewhere

Romans 15:4 seems to say that the place we find endurance and encouragement is the Scripture

Scripture was written for our application, for our life transformation... That is its purpose, and we are its intended audience

D. Many Immediate Purposes, One Ultimate Purpose

1. Scripture accomplishes countless things in our souls
2. Here a series of them are mentioned:
 - a. Instruction
 - b. Endurance
 - c. Encouragement
 - d. Hope
3. Many others also come
 - a. Warnings against sin
 - b. Enticements through promises
 - c. Joy and celebration
 - d. Wonder and awe
 - e. Insight and understanding
4. Ultimate purpose: Salvation through Christ to the Glory of God

2 Timothy 3:15 ... from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Romans 15:6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Scripture's purpose is to make God's elect "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus"

Salvation's purpose is that former sinners may be perfectly united in eternity and may glorify Him for His infinite mercy in Christ Jesus

PURPOSE: WE ARE SAVED ETERNALLY, GOD IS GLORIFIED ETERNALLY

II. Scripture's Glorious Chain Reaction

Romans 15:4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

There is a glorious chain of effects of Scripture here...

Scripture gives instruction... the instruction produces endurance and encouragement... these result in hope

A. Instruction

1. First, the ancient Scriptures are given to TEACH us
2. Scripture trains the mind to understand spiritual truth
3. Facts of God: His attributes, His nature, His purposes and plans... what He loves and what He hates
4. Facts of Christ: His person, His miracles, His sayings, His character, His death, His resurrection, His reign, His return
5. Facts of the People of God: The Jews in the Old Covenant, the Church in the New... what happened to those who obeyed, what happened to those who disobeyed
6. Spiritual insights flow from the pages of Scripture
7. TEACHING means that Spiritual Knowledge starts the entire process
 - a. You can't gain spiritual endurance and encouragement without first KNOWING some things from Scripture
 - b. Knowledge feeds faith, faith produces character changes, character changes result in actions
8. This is the essence of Romans 12:2

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

B. Endurance

1. Next Paul gives two character traits that are closely related

2. Endurance and encouragement go hand in hand
3. Endurance is the ability to persevere through trials and temptations without giving up
4. The essence of the two infinite journeys is that they require endurance in order to finish; without endurance we cannot long continue as Christians

Luke 8:15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

Romans 2:7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

NASB Romans 8:25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

Hebrews 10:36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

5. Hebrews 12 uses the image of a distance runner

Hebrews 12:1-3 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

6. Christian life can easily become very discouraging
 - a. We yearn to see more Christlikeness in ourselves, but sin is so powerful, besetting sins so discouraging
 - b. We yearn to see more godliness in our families, to see our marriages sweet and Christlike, to see our children become strong Christian leaders... but sin attacks there too
 - c. We yearn to lead people to Christ, we try to witness, but it seems people don't respond the way we would like
 - d. We yearn to see the church grow and flourish and be powerfully alive with fruit and with the evidence of God's blessing... but it always seems less than it could be
 - e. Satan is eager to sell us great discouragement and depression any time

Church History is full of Christian leaders who struggled mightily with discouragement

Martin Luther was so discouraged with the disappointing effects of preaching the true gospel in Wittenberg that he quit preaching for almost a year and a half

Often through Charles Spurgeon's ministry, the devil tried to defeat him with discouragement, as he does with every saint of God. He was attacked and slandered as books and articles were printed about him. Some questioned whether he was really born-again or not, or whether his ministry was honoring to God. He was called an actor, a comet that would appear and be gone. His enemies criticized his preaching, his pulpit manner, and even his character. His critics labeled him as vulgar and profane. One critic said, "He has gone up like a rocket, and ere long will come down like a stick."

7. All Christians **MUST** come back daily, again and again, to the Scriptures as the source of renewed endurance or we will certainly **GIVE UP**

8. How does Scripture resupply our endurance??

a. By examples of endurance in the Bible

- i) Abraham... who waited for over 25 years to see the fulfillment of his promise in the birth of Isaac
- ii) Joseph... who suffered being sold as a slave by his own brothers, falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, left in prison for years... all of it to fulfill God's plan of deliverance... and he never complained
- iii) Job... who persevered through much suffering without cursing God
- iv) Hannah... was waited on the Lord for the birth of Samuel
- v) Paul... who through incredible opposition and persecution continued to serve the Lord in city after city

b. By Promises of reward for any who persevere

Matthew 10:22 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

In Revelation 2-3, the "Letters to the Seven Churches", Jesus promises lavish rewards to those who persevere... who are faithful even to death:

Revelation 2:7 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Revelation 2:11 He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

Revelation 2:17 To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

Revelation 2:26-28 To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations-- ²⁸ I will also give him the morning star.

Revelation 3:21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

c. By dire warnings of what happens to people who don't persevere

Samson bore up under temptation with Delilah once, then twice, then three times... but finally he gave in to her constant prodding and told her the secret of his strength. He was captured by the Philistines, his eyes put out, and enslaved

d. By stimulations to prayer to strengthen perseverance

Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

e. By simple commands to endure

Hebrews 10:36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

C. Encouragement

1. Again this is a weighty word
2. It has a variety of translations: comfort, consolation, counsel, help
3. The Holy Spirit is called the "paraklete", the transliteration of the Greek word "counselor"... that is in the same word group here
4. The Holy Spirit delights to use the teachings of Scripture to produce encouragement more than any other way
5. Scripture gives you earnest counsel, sound advice, reliable assistance, sweet consolation when you're weary and down
 - a. You read of the sweetness of heaven
 - b. You read of the power of God to finish your salvation
 - c. You read of the mighty power of Christ's resurrection
 - d. You read of the defeat of Satan

- e. You read of the promises of God to help accomplish your victory
- 6. All of that tends toward your encouragement
 - a. Lit. “put courage into”
 - b. So you don’t lay home debilitated, listless, lacking all zeal for the journey

D. Hope

1. The final stage of this glorious chain: HOPE
2. Hope is a certainty of delightful future things based on the promises of God
3. Hope is closely related to faith, therefore
4. Hope gives a joyful energy to your daily walk with God
5. God gave to Abraham the covenant so that future generations would have an unshakeable HOPE

***Hebrews 6:13-19* When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, ¹⁴ saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants." ¹⁵ And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. ¹⁶ Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. ¹⁷ Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸ God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.**

So, when Abraham’s descendents were spending their whole lives in Egypt, making bricks for Pharaoh, they could maintain a sweet hopefulness based on God’s promise

This hope is the ANCHOR for our souls that keeps them from drifting away from Christ

III. God’s Wonderful Gifts: Endurance, Encouragement, Unity

***Romans 15:5-6* May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

A. Paul’s Benediction

1. A spoken blessing... not really a prayer, but almost
2. Similar to the Priestly Blessing of Numbers

Numbers 6:24-26 "The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."

B. Key Concept: Every Good Gift Comes from God

1. God gave the Scripture
2. Scripture gives instruction, endurance and encouragement, resulting in hope
3. God is the source of all these things
4. Notice: Endurance is from God
 - a. "God of endurance" = "the God who gives endurance"
 - b. The strength to see the race through to the end comes from God

"Chariots of Fire": Eric Liddell, great runner who was known as a 100m sprinter; after his most challenging race, a 400m race in which he was knocked to the ground, got up and digging deep sprinted to the finish line, just barely winning; preached a gospel message in which he likened the Christian life to a race

"Where then does the power come from to see the race to the end? It comes from within?"

However, the clear indication of this text and many others is that the resources to see the Christian race through to the end do not ultimately come from us... they must be resupplied by God day after day after day, or we WILL give up

So, the film corrected the message later when Eric Liddell read from Isaiah 40. In this comes the true secret of renewing strength in the race:

Isaiah 40:28-31 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

C. God's Further Gift: A Spirit of Unity

1. Paul's Purpose in Romans 14-15
 - a. This has been Paul's deepest desire all along... this is the whole reason he's been writing
 - b. He doesn't want the strong and weak dividing; he doesn't want the Gentiles and Jews fracturing into separate groups

- c. So He speaks a benediction, a blessing of unity on what might become a faction-ridden group
 - d. It's not just instruction, endurance, encouragement and hope these folks need
 - e. They also need to be one as the Father and the Son are one... they need a church fellowship in which the sweet spirit of unity pervades
2. Unity "according to Christ Jesus"
- a. Greek implies there is a unity that Christ alone can give
 - b. The unity of His Spirit
 - c. Idea: as we follow Christ and understand His mind and heart, we will become more and more one
3. This also a gift of God

"May God give you a spirit of unity among yourselves"

- a. God has the power to make divided minds be one
- b. God has the power to make divided hearts one as well
- c. He will do this perfectly in heaven
- d. To do it more and more on earth is of great value for the advance of the gospel
- e. Divided and bickering Christians should drop their weapons of conflict (their backbiting, gossip, slander, anger, divisiveness) and get on their knees; they should study Scripture and seek God's face in prayer until the division ends

IV. God's Ultimate Purpose: Perfect Unity in Glorifying Him

Romans 15:5-6 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- A. The Purpose of Everything: The Glory of God
- 1. The end result here: a congregation of redeemed people glorifying God with one heart and mouth
 - 2. This is God's ultimate purpose in everything He did or is doing

B. God's Purpose in Creation and in Redemption

C. A Foretaste of Heaven

1. Corporate worship should be a foretaste of heaven
2. There disparate people from every tribe, nation, people, and language will with one heart and mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
3. There will be no divisions by race, nor by gender, nor by age, nor by era in which we lived, nor by language, nor by intelligence, nor by gifting
4. Rather, all of us will be perfectly united in heart and mind, and we will fall down on our faces and glorify God

Revelation 7:9-12 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

5. Therefore, since that is our future, it is good for us as much as possible to experience it HERE and NOW, on earth
6. We should prepare our hearts for worship with deep meditations on Scripture, with reconciliation between brothers and sisters where needed, with prayer and confession of sin and bringing forth fruit in keeping with repentance... so that when we assemble here to worship on Sundays we will as much as possible give a picture of the heavenly worship to which we are going

V. Application

A. Draw Constantly From Scripture

1. As the trees roots sink deep into the fertile soil and draw out nutrients and moisture constantly, so must we be with the Bible
2. If you are feeling discouraged and weak in your Christian journey, go again to the nourishing soil of the word of God
3. Take in its promises, its commands, its warnings and prohibitions, its consolations and examples... do this with an eye to giving yourself what you need to be instructed, encouraged, consoled... so that your HOPE will soar

B. Maintain Unity in the Body

C. Prepare Weekly for Corporate Worship

D. Come to Christ... that is Scripture's True and Final Purpose