

Therefore: share!

- In pairs or groups earlier:
 - Sheila is a missionary - what comes to mind?
 - David is an evangelist - what comes to mind?
 - you are a witness - what comes to mind?

Introduction

- DMPC - often hard to get a seat on a Sunday morning...
 - healthy!!
- Church growth experts tell us that a church that is around 80% full at its main service of worship is unlikely to grow much further.
- Makes sense, kind of - harder to get a seat, uncomfortableness of a crowded service - might just not come! So, for every new person who comes, someone who has been coming slips away... (and in a congregation our size, it is really hard to notice that slow process - a recent church survey in England reckoned that 90% of people who left a church were not visited in the critical 6 weeks immediately after their departure...)
- Paul was operating in a period of church growth, indeed of church explosion!
 - but though the church was expanding rapidly, there were also active questions about who was eligible to become part of the church
 - most pressingly, were the Gentiles to be allowed in??
 - never mind would they get a seat, would they be allowed through the door?
- As Paul continues to work through the implications of the gospel in the way we order our lives, he makes the case that the gospel is open to all:
 - indeed that we must share it with everyone!
- And he makes that case in two ways:

For Jew and For Gentile

- First, from extensive OT evidence, Paul makes case the Biblical case for Gentiles being in kingdom
- *This into a context of suspicion of the Gentiles by Jews, often looking down on, verging sometimes on hatred:*
 - lawyers of Judaism: however many hundred commands (600+ in OT)...
 - love your neighbour as yourself...
 - but who is my neighbour? Must be my fellow-Jew!
 - aha - then I don't have to love my non-neighbour, the Samaritan, the Greek, the Roman, the other!!
- Paul says, "that attitude is rubbish!!"
 - (v.9, 2 Samuel 22:50) "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name."
 - (v.10, Deuteronomy 32:43) "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."
 - (v.11, Psalm 117:1) And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples."
 - (v.12, Isaiah 11:10) "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him."
- Quoting from all the main sections of the OT - Law, history, prophets, "writings" (Psalms)
- "So," Paul says, "if - as we believe - Jesus is the culmination of God's purposes, that culmination includes the welcoming of the Gentiles into the kingdom."

By my example...

- Paul doesn't merely make a case for Gentile inclusion, he works out his theory in his practice!
 - his living matched his talking!

- Latter section of the section we read is a reflection set against a backdrop of the way in which Paul habitually worked:
 - preaching in new places;
 - seeking to set up worshiping communities;
 - including the Gentiles in the newly established churches!
 - helping shape and guide the new life of those young churches;
 - appointing leaders to take on and continue that work - not simply maintain the new churches, but see them grow;
 - writing letters, discipling, encouraging, visiting, sending others to do the same...
- In other words, Paul planted **self-replicating, growing churches**.
 - that was his desire - and the desire he planted in the hearts of his converts.
- Witness the incredible growth of the Church in the early years, spreading like wildfire across the Roman Empire, turning the world upside down.
- Paul essentially worked his way round the Eastern Mediterranean, planting churches as he went - staying longer in some places than others, but always wanting to take the Gospel to new people.
- Hence his desire to go on to Spain - he saw that it was his duty to make Jesus Christ known - and so to see the church grow.
- **Paul's assumption was that the church would grow.**
- An expectation built on his **experience, <black> yes, on his faith**, but most of all **on the Lord he was seeking to make known** - the Lord who promised to build his church on Peter...
- His ambition to build - in Spain, in Rome, around the Eastern Med, on his trip to Jerusalem - everywhere he went and in everything he did.

For us?

- Hard to see how that could apply to us!
 - we are all, so far as I am aware, Gentiles, non-Jews!!
 - hardly need to make the case for our inclusion in the church!!
- **But... two things might be said in light of Paul's priorities:**

Gear up for the outsider!

- Paul is encouraging his contemporaries to consciously work at accepting into their midst those who wouldn't naturally fit there:
 - those who they would naturally, perhaps even subconsciously exclude
- And I wonder whether we are guilty of the same thing...
 - oh, not consciously shutting the door on certain kinds of people...
 - **though that does happen - eg white only churches in racist cultures**
 - perhaps more difficult to spot
- What entry requirements do we place on people before they can join us?
 - ability to come at either 11am or 6pm on a Sunday?
 - set of cultural expectations about what is appropriate for a worship service - silence, singing, sitting/standing, giving money, listening, reading...
 - particular set of acceptable behaviour: who we are sleeping with, how "sorted" our lives are, how scrupulous/honest we are (though we are perhaps less concerned with how greedy people are, or how they treat the poor!)
 - what clothes we wear!
- We need to work at pulling those barriers down:
 - not only the things to do with the way services and meetings are run;
 - but also our attitudes to those who don't fit into what we think of as acceptable, sorted Christian people, people whose lives are messy and messed up - because they are still without Christ, or are only just submitting to his Lordship

Make including others your priority, your ambition!

- Second thing we can say is in light of Paul's determination to share the good news of the gospel:

- his whole life is geared round this task;
- everything he does, every decision he makes is within the context of this overall priority
- *his "ambition" - compare what folk will do today for sake of ambition!*
- This is why I got you to think about those words earlier in the service!
 - for I suspect most of us have a (false) hierarchy in our heads of Christian service: cross-cultural missionary, pastor, full-time Christian worker (SU, UCCF, youth worker), maybe then some of the serving professions (doctor, nurse, teacher) and down the bottom anything that smacks of making money!
- We leave the task of including others into the Kingdom to others - to the missionaries and evangelists!
 - *see graph!!*
- We think of witnessing wrong, and so don't do it (or don't realise we are doing it!!)
- Paul wanted partners in that work - including financial support (v.24,27), hospitality, (v.24), prayer (v.30)
- In other words, he himself had including others, especially outsiders, into the kingdom as a priority, and he wanted the folk in Rome who he was hoping to visit to partner him with that same priority.
- Will we join with Paul in struggling (v.30) to share our faith?