

The business that is often overlooked

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- [0 : 00] Recently, a study was done to determine the world's largest businesses. I wonder if you know what they are. I'm going to tell you the top three, and let's see if you maybe have guessed correctly.
- In third place, I'm sure you didn't guess this, was a Taiwanese company, Honhai Precision Industry. Anybody heard about Honhai Precision Industry? No, I don't think so.
- Well, the chances are, even though you haven't heard about it, many of the parts in the motherboard of your computer were made by Honhai Precision Industry. As of last year, they had manufacturing operations in nine countries and employ a combined workforce of 1.3 million employees, which is more than the population of some small countries.
- So that's third place. In second place is a little business you may have heard of called McDonald's. Founded in 1940, this fast food chain now has 36,535 outlets in 119 countries, with a workforce of 1.9 million employees serving, they claim, about 68 million customers every day.
- That's a lot of Big Macs and fries. And a lot of calories, I imagine. And then, in first place, is the American retail chain Walmart. It has over 11,000 stores in 28 countries, selling everything from asparagus to assault rifles.
- [1 : 28] You may have shopped at one without even knowing it, because it's called different things in different countries. It's called Asda in the UK, for example. And if you've been to Japan, it's called Seiyuu in Japan. And so it's all over the place, and we don't even know it.
- And it employs over 2.2 million employees. It's by far the largest business in the world. Or is it? Because I've come across another business that people often overlook.
- It's got branches in every country in the world. It's got a workforce of over 2 billion people, and it's been going strong for 19 centuries.
- I work for this organization, and if you're a Christian, so do you. It's called The Church. And its CEO is Jesus Christ.
- It's often not considered a business, though, because it makes no profits. It's not listed on any stock exchange. Many of its employees don't earn a salary but have to work a second job.
- [2 : 29] However, it's just as busy as any business is. And its business is far more important than making money. Its business is saving souls.
- Its business is bringing people to eternal life. Because its leader, Jesus, did something that no one else could do. He took on the sins of people, on himself, of other people.
- He paid the penalty for those sins so that sinners can come back to God, and sinners can find life, and sinners can have the hope of eternity. And ever since he did that, the church has been hard at work making that truth known all over the world, despite any opposition they face.

It's the biggest company on earth, and it's doing the most important work that anybody could ever be involved in. And so if you're a follower of Christ this morning, your 9 to 5 job may be working for an earthly company, but never forget that your main job is working for a heavenly one.

And so it's vital that you understand what this company is all about, what this company's business is, what operations it's involved in. I don't know if you've ever worked for a big organization before, but I worked for a number of years at the Fashini Group head office up in Paro.

[3 : 48] And because it's such a big national company, I had to undergo quite a few days of orientation. Because it's so big and it's got so many different brands and shops and branches and things, I had to spend a number of days just getting to know the company, just getting to know what operations it's involved in, so I could be a productive employee, so I could work as part of that company.

Well, you see, Christians also need an orientation about the church, this great big worldwide organization we're involved in. We need to understand what its operations are so that we can be effective members of that church and to know just how we can involve ourselves in it and what we should be spending our time on and our resources on.

And that's really what this morning's passage is about. The Apostle Paul is writing to the church in Rome, and as an apostle, he's essentially, I guess, one of the board members of this global business called the church.

And he's nearing the end of his letter, and he wants to remind the Roman church that they, as a local church in Rome, are actually part of a bigger worldwide business. And he wants to tell them what that business is all about.

He wants to remind them so that they can see themselves as part of that big business and get busy with the business of that organization. And so this morning, I want us to do the same. I want us to be reminded of the business we're in and to look at three major operations of the church that we see in this passage because the business that the church is involved in hasn't changed over the last 19 centuries.

[5 : 21] These operations are the very same operations that we must be busy with as Christians today. And so let's look at them. The first operation that I want to talk about is preaching.

Preaching the word. Now, preaching is traditionally the main activity of a church meeting. It's kind of traditionally the central thing in a Sunday service. And yet, that's becoming less and less the case in many churches around the world.

More and more churches seem to be moving away from the centrality of the preached word and sidelining the Sunday sermon in favor of more entertaining activities like drama presentations or movies or music items.

And the service is packed with these kind of things so that the sermon itself is reduced maybe to a 10 to 15 minute devotion more than anything else. And, you know, why not?

I mean, sermons are so boring, aren't they? 30 minutes of the preacher just blabbing on and on and on. And if you've been coming to church for any length of time, you've heard it all before.

[6 : 29] You know all this. You've read your Bible. You know what it's all about. Why do you have to keep coming each week and hearing it all again? I wonder if you've ever questioned that. Well, that's just the thing.

Have a look at what Paul writes from verse 14. He says, Now notice something important here, right?

Despite these Roman Christians being filled with knowledge, Paul nonetheless writes a huge big letter filled with a whole bunch of stuff they already know.

Why? Well, he says in verse 14 to, no, 15, to remind them. They need to be reminded of these things. Now think about that, right?

If a group of Christians, full of goodness, filled with knowledge, and competent to teach one another, need to be reminded of the gospel, how much more do we need to be reminded of the gospel and the truths in the Bible?

[7 : 43] How much more do we need to come every week from a world that is trying to distract us from eternity and be reminded again of what is true? and fix our eyes afresh on God's kingdom so that we can resist the deceitfulness of sin which is trying to claw at us every day.

And that is what preaching is meant to do. You see, preaching is meant to remind us of these truths. It's meant to give us the bigger picture again. It's meant to put our daily lives in context of the great things that God is doing, which means that we don't come to church to be entertained, I'm sorry to say.

And we don't even come to church primarily to be inspired or to be encouraged. We come to church to be reminded again of what is true, truths that we so easily forget.

And I'm not just talking about the traditional kind of preaching from the pulpit either. Notice that Paul commends the Romans for being competent to instruct one another.

Did you notice that? You see, in their case, they didn't have a full-time preacher. All they had really were the Old Testament and a few letters from the apostles. And so most of their learning, most of their daily and weekly learning from Scripture came from one another as they taught and reminded each other of what these letters said, even though they had read them before.

[9 : 07] Which tells us something, doesn't it? It tells us that the task of preaching the Word is much bigger than just me standing in a pulpit on a Sunday morning. This task of opening up and explaining God's Word is something that happens not just on a Sunday, but it happens every time a Christian meets up with someone else to open the Bible together.

It happens every time someone encourages a brother or sister who's sick or down or anxious by opening up the Bible. It happens every time a neighbor shares the message of Jesus over the fence.

It happens every time a father reads the Bible to his children during family devotions. And so it's a work that all of us need to be involved in, in some way or another.

Not just me. Each of us should be looking for opportunities to bring God's Word, to bring light into darkness, to bring God's Word into people's lives because they desperately need to be reminded of what is true.

And they need to remind you of what is true. We need to be opening God's Word with each other. We need to effectively be preaching to one another, reminding each other of these great truths in the Bible.

[10 : 24] And so, if you are a follower of Christ, if you're a Christian this morning, I wonder who God is going to put across your path this coming week who needs a reminder of what God says.

Or maybe needs to hear it for the first time. And are you looking out for that person? Are you going to go out into this week looking out for that person who needs to hear from God and realize that you may well be the channel through which God's going to speak to them?

What a great honor that is. Because that's the first task we're meant to be busy with as the church on earth. Preaching God's Word, opening up God's Word, reminding each other of God's Word any way we can and in every context we can.

The second vital operation of the church that we see in this passage is that of pioneering. A pioneer is a person who breaks new ground, who enters into new territory.

And in history, it's the pioneer countries that grew into the richest empires. Those countries that raised up and encouraged a pioneering spirit like England or Spain or Portugal who sent explorers all over the world like Vasco da Gama and Francis Drake and Captain Cook.

[11 : 46] And those are the empires. The pioneering empires are those of the empires that strengthened and kept growing. And the same principle applies in business today. We don't have national empires anymore, but we do have business empires.

And the most profitable businesses are those whose employees are always not just going to their job and doing their job, but always looking to push the boundaries, always looking to try new things, challenge the status quo.

Apple Computers is an example. You know, iPhones, iPads, Apple Macs, all of those things. That company was so successful because, well, at least for a time, they were always on the cutting edge of technology.

They were always the first to have new things. They were pioneers. And all of their employees had that kind of mindset. They were involved in some way in this pioneering work. They were always pushing boundaries.

Well, you see, the church needs to do that too if we want to keep growing, if we want to be effective. Look at what Paul says from verse 20. He says this, 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.

[13 : 00] Rather, as it is written, those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand. This is why I've often been hindered from coming to you.

But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I've been longing for many years to visit you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there.

Okay, so Paul, just in writing this to the Romans, he knows what God's business on earth is. He's quite clear about what God is doing, isn't he? He knows that God's business is to reach as many people as possible with the message of the salvation of Jesus, because every single human needs to hear that.

and God's business is to make that possible for every human to hear, to make it possible for every single human on this planet to have their sins dealt with and to come to their creator in a real eternal relationship.

And God doing that on earth, God pioneering and pushing these boundaries to reach new people with the gospel, it's what was foretold by the prophets, like in Isaiah, which Paul quotes, which we read earlier.

[14 : 15] centuries before Jesus came, the prophets foretold this would be God's work on earth. This is God's plan. And Paul knows that he's been called to play a part in God's work on earth.

God's business to reach the unreached. As he puts it in verse 20, to preach the gospel where Christ is not known. And that's what he says his ambition is.

That's what he calls his ambition. Now, people can have a lot of ambitions in life, can't they? I mean, our life is full of people, our world is full of people with ambitions.

Whether it be to own a lot of property or to make enough money to retire comfortably or to own a garage full of rare antique vehicles or to be president, I don't know, whatever it is, whatever your ambition is.

People will always have ambitions and what people will do is when they've got an ambition that they're aiming towards, they will always make whatever sacrifices are necessary in order to achieve that ambition.

[15 : 20] Whether that be to work long hours or sacrifices of money to invest in things, whatever it might be, there's always sacrifices that come with achieving one's ambition. And we've all got ambitions in life.

But Paul, you see, Paul, when he believed the gospel, when he discovered what God is doing on earth and the role that he is called to play in that, his ambitions changed from chasing after his own goals to chasing after God's goals.

And so he was willing to sacrifice his earthly ambitions for his new heavenly ambition. And you see, Paul's not alone because every follower of Christ, everybody who's come to that point of realizing what God is doing on this earth is called to have the same ambition.

Not our ambitions, but God's ambitions. And that's what Paul goes on to imply to the Roman church. He tells them in verse 23 and 24, this is interesting, he tells them he plans to come to visit them and it's a long-awaited visit.

For years and years and years they wanted Paul to come visit them. But notice that he says, I'm only going to visit you on my way to Spain. I'm only going to pop in and like pop my head in and say hi.

[16 : 37] Oh, and I need you to help me get to Spain by the way. So I need your money and supplies and things. He's very like blatant about it. He just assumes the Roman church is going to help him with money and supplies.

He's never met them before, but he just assumes. Because you see, he's a man on a mission. And he takes it for granted that other Christians will have the same ambition as he has.

He doesn't even question it. If they're Christians, he knows, well, they're going to have the same ambition. They're going to be involved in the same work I'm involved in. And they will make whatever sacrifices necessary to achieve that.

Because that's God's ambition and so it must be the ambition of his people as well. And that is, man, it's just such an amazing privilege of believing scripture.

When God has brought you to that point of actually believing this is true and you can open scripture and you can see God's plans in action and you can see what he's doing in this world, to be involved in that, to be called to be involved in that is the greatest privilege that we can ever have.

[17 : 50] Why wouldn't we make that our ambition? Why wouldn't we make that our passion above every other ambition in life? Well, that's what the Bible is calling us to make our ambition above all other things, to match our ambitions to God's ambitions.

And so let me ask you, is that your ambition? Is your involvement in church just really to benefit you? Or are you partnering in the gospel to reach the unreached?

Are you using the money that God has given you to invest in gospel growth? Are you using the gifts that God has given you in the business of spreading the gospel however he's called you to be involved in that? Are you looking for opportunities in your daily life to reach those you come into contact with who may not yet heard about the gospel, at least may not yet have understood the gospel?

You know, we've got tons, dozens of people, hundreds, thousands of people around us who have either not heard the gospel or who have just maybe heard it as a kid at Sunday school and never really understood it.

And if we don't come to them and explain it to them who's going to? You know, is that your ambition? Are those the things that occupy your thoughts?

[19 : 06] Or are you too distracted by earthly ambitions to even give a care for God's ambitions? See, we need desperately to line up our ambitions to God's ambitions if we're ever going to be able to do what he's called us to do as his people.

We need to be pioneers. Constantly thinking of new ways to reach more and more unreached people with the message of the kingdom. That's the business that we're in and if we're not doing that, then what are we doing here?

That's the second primary operation of the church. Pioneering. And then there's one last vital operation of the church that I want us to see, which is possibly the most vital of them all.

And that is prayer. Look at verse 30. I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

Now this is not the only way that Paul asks for help. Earlier he asked for money to be supported in his mission to Spain. But this way is really the most fundamental and important way that he needs the Romans to get on board with his mission.

[20 : 28] To join him in his struggle by praying. In other words, by praying, we are joining into this great worldwide struggle, into this battle of carrying out God's work on earth.

God's work on earth. And Paul knows that prayer is powerful. Paul knows that God acts in response to his people's prayers. Now, every time I see that in Scripture, I'm just bowled away.

I don't know about you, but it's an incredible truth that God acts in response to the prayers of us, little creatures on earth.

because Jesus has removed this barrier of sin, through him we have daily access to the creator of the universe in prayer. And our prayers literally move the hand of God to act in our world.

I mean, if that doesn't bowl you over, then nothing will. It's amazing. It's amazing. And it literally makes prayer one of the most powerful weapons that the church wields against all of our enemies who want to stop us from doing God's work, which every single day are attacking us, are attacking you invisibly, silently.

[21 : 44] Your enemies are attacking you to drag you away from doing God's work, to distract you with things that are passing away. And when you are doing God's work, they'll throw every single obstacle in the way to stop you.

And there are many, many enemies we face, both physical and spiritual enemies. We must get that right. As a church, we're at war and we have many enemies on every side.

And the question, therefore, is are we wielding this greatest weapon that God has given us? Or are we leaving it in its holster while we're being attacked from all sides? I mean, as a soldier, would you ever do that?

As a soldier, you know, if you were being attacked by enemies, would you ever leave your gun in your holster or slung on your back and go, I don't know what to do? But we do that as Christians, don't we? when we're being attacked by enemies on all sides and we go, I don't know what to do, but we don't stop and we don't pray and we don't commit time and struggle and wrestle in prayer.

Or maybe, maybe we're praying, but we're only praying according to our own wants and ambitions and not God's ambitions, which is really just as ineffective. And so we must consider, are we praying strategic prayers?

[22 : 59] Consider your own prayer life. Are you engaging in the struggle? Are you engaging in God's ambitions and God's business on earth with your prayers? Are you engaging in the fight against Satan to advance God's kingdom in the lives of people and families and communities?

Are we seeking to break down spiritual strongholds that are preventing the gospel from reaching more and more people because there are huge strongholds that are preventing that and prayer is the greatest weapon against them?

Are we wielding that weapon? Listen to what one writer, Christopher Ash, writes in his commentary on this passage. He says, we must go for Satan's jugular in our prayers and not get distracted into majoring on minor skirmishes.

I imagine Satan briefing his junior devils. I'm afraid we can't stop them praying altogether. Some of them have got into the habit. But let's divert them from the jugular and get them aiming for my little toe.

See if you can get them to spend all their prayer time praying about physical illness. When their circumstances are difficult, get them to focus their praying on asking them that things will get easier. But whatever you do, don't let them pray for courage or faithfulness to Christ in their difficult circumstances.

[24 : 20] I don't mind too much if their health returns or their circumstances get easier, but I mind very much if they are loyal witnesses to Christ and servants of the gospel. And so, in closing, are you going to be involved in God's great business on earth?

Ask yourself that. Do you want to be involved in that? Now, whatever business you work for on earth, you're expected to do the work of that business, aren't you?

You're not expected to spend your working day slacking off on Facebook or whatever. You're expected to focus on the work of the business. Well, how much more are you meant to do that when you're employed for God's business?

And so, are you going to uphold preaching? And are you going to make the word of God central to your life, both in receiving the reminders you need each week and putting aside other things that are going to distract you from that, as well as in reminding others of what the word says?

Are you going to be involved in that work? Are you going to partner in pioneering? And are you going to invest in the work of taking the gospel out to those who have not yet heard it?

[25 : 35] And are you going to pray? Are you going to pray, but not just any old prayers, strategic prayers, regular prayers for gospel growth, for God's work on earth, for the business that God's involved in?

Are you going to be involved in God's business on earth? Well, it just might be this morning that there is something stopping you from being involved in that business.

Because maybe God first has business to do with you. Maybe he hasn't signed you up yet to his business. Maybe you are still far from him.

Maybe you don't share his ambitions. Maybe your relationship with him is still not right and you know that deep down inside. Well, if that's the case, I want to assure you, I want you to know this morning, Jesus Christ came for the express purpose of fixing that relationship, bringing you back to your creator, bringing you back to the purpose for which he made you.

Jesus came to take away your sins and bring you into God's family and bring you into God's business, which is the most exciting thing you could ever be involved in on this planet. So will you trust in him?

[26 : 52] Will you sign up? Will you put your faith in Christ? Will you stop resisting him? Will you turn and follow him today? Don't waste any time.

Don't waste your life concentrating on earthly ambitions that will pass away and will be forgotten a few years after you're dead. Don't waste your life on those things.

Follow Christ. Sign up. Remember the disciples? When Jesus was walking on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he called his disciples to follow him and they dropped everything.

They dropped their business. They dropped what they were doing. They dropped their earthly ambitions and they followed him. No matter what the cost. Will you do the same? And if you already have done that, then there's one last thing I want to say.

It's one thing to preach this and nod our heads in agreement. It's another thing to do it. And so Jean and I have actually decided to devote a number of Wednesday evenings for the remainder of this year and hopefully make it a regular thing after that to invite anyone who wants to join us in our home to struggle in prayer for the growth of the gospel at St. Mark's.

[28 : 02] will you join us? You don't have to be an expert in praying. You just need to have a gospel ambition. You need to share God's ambitions.

You just need a desire to see the growth of the gospel from this church. A desire to see God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. And you need to believe like Paul believed that prayer is the greatest weapon we wield.

And so will you join us? Our first, I'm not going to call it a prayer meeting because that just sounds boring. It's a strategic offensive against Satan's strongholds and it'll be this coming Wednesday at 7 o'clock for about an hour at our home in Limpley Road.

So will you do that? It's in your notices and I call you to struggle together with us. If you can't make it, maybe you want to devote that time at home to praying, using your notices as a guide, praying for our missionaries, praying for our church, praying strategic prayers for the spread of God's kingdom here in Plumstead and beyond.

Let's do that now. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this amazing call that you have issued in the Lord Jesus Christ and through your apostles, this call to be involved with your business on earth.

[29 : 20] Thank you that we have the honor of being involved in your business on earth. Help us, Lord, not to get distracted by earthly ambitions. Help us to share your ambition and equip us and strengthen us to achieve it.

Equip us and give us boldness to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to get on board with your business. And would you use us, use us at this church, Lord. Help us to pray.

Help us to preach, not just on Sundays, but throughout the week. Help us to open your word to each other and help us, Lord, to be pioneers to take your gospel as far and wide as we possibly can.

Grow us, Lord, as a church so that we can do this effectively in Jesus' name. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.