

## A Passion For The Lost

### Romans 9: 1 – 3

- The shift of emotions that takes place between the end of Romans 8 and the beginning of Romans 9 is about as jarring as any you might find in the Bible.
  - At the end of chapter 8, Paul is exalting in God's saving work; exalting in the great confidence that comes from the theological truths that because our salvation comes from the work of God and because God is sovereign over all, there is nothing in heaven above, or earth below, or even the pit of hell that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.
  - But then we come to chapter 9, and listen to what Paul says next:

**Romans 9: 1 – 5** I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—<sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. <sup>5</sup> To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

- At the end of chapter 8, Paul is standing on the mountaintop taking in the vista of God's grace to us. But as Paul stands atop the mountain of hope where he sees that nothing in the world, visible or invisible, could separate him from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:37–39), he also sees his kinsmen in the hopeless valley and in anguish wishes he could be separated from Christ, if only it resulted in his fellow Jews reaching the summit.
  - Just as it was important for us to stand with Paul and take in the vista from the mountaintop, it is also important that we learn how to grieve with Paul for those who are lost and dying apart from Christ.

*"It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all of our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people."*

C. S. Lewis

- It is great for us to live in the comfort that people we know, and love are saved, and their eternal destiny is secure, but shouldn't we also live in grief and anguish for those who live around us who are lost and dying?
  - Even as we rejoice in the sure hope that is ours in Christ, our souls should also be filled with grief and anguish for the lost and dying.

**Romans 9: 2** I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

#### 1. The object of Paul's anguish

- Paul was distressed over Jewish unbelief in Jesus. He felt distress on a personal level: he was a Jew and knew and loved hundreds, perhaps thousands of Jews personally. They were his friends, family, neighbors, and acquaintances. They

had at least for now rejected Christ, and because of that Paul knew that their souls were in danger of an eternity in hell.

- Any person who understands the Gospel and the stakes that are involved in accepting or rejecting the Gospel will feel anguish in their soul when people that they care about continue to walk in darkness.
  - Some of you can identify very easily with what Paul is writing here, because you have a loved one or a neighbor, or co-worker that you know is unsaved, or maybe even who has walked away from professed faith in Christ, and like Paul you are filled with anguish in your soul for the ones you love who are lost.
- But Paul's distress went beyond that. His people, the people of Israel, were God's chosen people to whom "belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship . . . the promises . . . the patriarchs, and from their race . . . the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever." Jews were rejecting their own Christ, and this caused Paul "unceasing anguish."
  - Many of us in the room, at least in a small way, can relate to what Paul is feeling. We look at our nation, and we think how could this be happening? How could so many of our fellow countrymen and women have strayed so far into unbelief and sinfulness, when as a people we have been so blessed? God truly has shed His grace on us, and we are squandering it away just as the Jews did in Paul's day.
  - It is normal for a person to feel anguish over the eternal state of a loved one. It's not unusual for a person to feel distress over the state of their country. We should feel that in the same way that Paul did, but what is really remarkable about Paul, and what sets Paul apart from most of us, is that Paul felt this anguish of the soul for people who were also his enemies.
    - Once Paul became a Christian, the Jews made his life miserable. They hounded Paul following him from place to place. They stirred up mobs against Paul who beat him, whipped him, and even tried to kill him by stoning him. They drove Paul out of the cities where he had planted churches, and often sent false teachers to try to subvert Paul's teachings.
    - They hated Paul, but Paul loved them, and felt anguish over their eternal destiny.
      - That's a bridge that is a lot further than most of us are willing to go; isn't it? We love family members and naturally feel anguish for them. We care about our fellow countrymen, and may even feel anguish for them, but those who are our enemies? That's an entirely different thing for most of us. But it shouldn't be. What did Jesus tell us to do?

**Luke 6: 27 – 28** Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

- If you have ever tried that, you know how hard it is to do. You know how hard it is to feel anguish in our soul for those who have or are hurting us. In fact, the truth is that oftentimes rather than feeling anguish, there is at least a little part of

us that wants our enemies to get what is coming to them. But Jesus wasn't that way at all. Just days before he would be crucified, Jesus said:

**Matthew 23:37** "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.

- That is anguish of the heart, even for people who are your enemies. Just like Paul, Jesus yearned for the salvation of his ethnic people. He knew what was coming. He knew that in 70 AD Rome would annihilate Jerusalem, and he longed to protect His people from God's coming judgment. Yet these people that Jesus longed to gather under his wings were the very ones who would be part of his murder, just a few days later.
- How good it is for us that Jesus yearns to save those who are lost, those who are even his enemies because we too were once enemies of Christ.

**Colossians 1:21-22** Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death.

- Even though sometimes we start to think we are special, we have to remember that Jesus didn't love us and die for us because we were good people who were his friends. He loved us and died for us when we were his enemies, and the way he conquered us as his enemies was by loving us into submission.
  - When Jesus told us to love even our enemies, this is the life that Jesus is calling us to.
  - This is what Paul had experienced in his own life. At one time, he too was an enemy of Christ.

**1 Timothy 1: 13 – 15** though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup> and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

- That is Paul saying, "There but for the grace of God go I."
- Compassion for the lost starts with us remembering what Christ's love and mercy has rescued us from. As we look at other people the constant refrain of our heart should truly be, "There but for the grace of God, go I."
  - It's easy for us to look at many of the people who came into Sturgis and shake our heads and look down our nose. But the truth is if we engage with these people, we find out that they are not all that different from us. Like us they are looking to live life to the full, the only difference is that we have found that life in Jesus, and many of them haven't yet. It is easy to forget, there but for the grace of God goes each of us.

**1 Corinthians 15: 10** by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.

- We haven't changed ourselves and made ourselves into what we are. It is God's grace that has done that.

- Sturgis Rally week, could just as easily be called the Rally of lost souls, but how much compassion do we feel for the lost who gather here each year? Stop and think what Jesus felt as lost souls gathered around him.

**Matthew 9: 36 – 37** When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup>Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

- One of the reasons the laborers are so few is because we just can’t seem to muster up within that compassion and anguish for the lost.

***“Ask God to give you a broken heart for the lost, if you have that then just about any program will do.”***

- If we can speak of God’s election and people’s spiritual blindness and hardness and Christ-rejection as cold theological doctrines without being moved deeply, then we are not loving the way that Christ loved us.
  - So, we must plead with God to give us a heart that is broken for those who are lost. Because it is that broken heart that will move us to action.
- Think how we often treat those who are our enemies. We separate ourselves from them—try to avoid them. But that is not what we see either Paul or Jesus do.
  - Think how Jesus dealt with us as his enemies. He moved toward us. In fact, he didn’t just move toward us, he moved right in beside us. Why?

**Hebrews 4: 15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

- What happened to Jesus as he moved into our world and suffered alongside of us? He sympathized with us. What does it mean to sympathize or feel compassion for someone? It means to put yourselves in their position and feel what they are feeling. It is the same thing we see Paul do here in Romans.
- Paul could have removed himself from his enemies, those who wanted to kill him, but instead, even though it would mean suffering, like receiving the 40 lashes minus 1, in love Paul moved toward them just as Jesus did.

## **2. The cause of Paul’s anguish**

- Paul moved toward his enemies, those who were lost, because he himself remembered what it was like to be lost.

**Romans 10: 1 – 3** Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. <sup>2</sup>For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. <sup>3</sup>For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.

- Through Christ, God had offered true righteousness to Jew and Gentile alike, but the Jews rejected the righteousness of Christ in order to try to pursue a righteousness of their own that could never save them, because it would never be righteous enough.

- Paul knew what it was like to think this way. At one time, he was just like his people. Listen to how Paul describes himself in:

**Philippians 3: 4 – 7** If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup>circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup>But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

- There but for the grace of God go I. In His grace and mercy, God opened Paul's eyes to see the surpassing worth of knowing Christ and his righteousness, but Paul's countrymen were still walking in darkness.
- Israel, as a whole, missed the meaning of the law and missed the meaning of Christ. The law was to lead them to Christ, and Christ was to be their righteousness. And the way to be righteous with Christ's righteousness was faith, not works.

**Romans 10: 4** For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

- But Israel sought to establish their own righteousness by works rather than have the gift of God's righteousness provided by Christ through faith.
- This is the curse of sin that Paul's fellow Israelites are living under because they rejected the only one who could save them from the curse of the law.

**Galatians 3:13** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree."

- At the cross, Christ became our curse, and Christ became our sin, and Christ became our righteousness. But the Jews would not have him. And so, they are accursed and cut off from Christ.

### 3. The authenticity of Paul's anguish

- This isn't just a show, not just hyperbole. Paul has genuine anguish for his people.

**Romans 9: 1 – 2** I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— <sup>2</sup>that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

- This is a remarkable plea in verse 1: Believe me. I am telling the truth in Christ. I am not lying.
  - He can't prove it – how can you prove your grief? Tears can be manufactured. Trembling voices can be learned and artificial. He can't prove it. He can only plead that his conscience is moved by the Holy Spirit and that his testimony is shaped by Christ.
- Why was it necessary for Paul to try to prove that his anguish was real? Because some doubted his love and the genuineness of his sorrow. Why? Because, even though he was a Jew, Paul has said things that could be taken as anti-Jewish.
  - Back in Romans 2:24 he quoted the prophets, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

- In Romans 3:9 he said, "Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin."
- Here in Romans 9: 3 he says that Israel is accursed and cut off from Christ.
- If we are speaking the truth of God's word to others, we can come across as unloving and judgmental. So, it is always important that people know that we truly do care about them.
  - In one of the commentaries that I am using in my preparation each week, I came across the story of a congregation that had dismissed its pastor. Someone asked one of the members why they had dismissed the pastor. *"The pastor kept telling us that we were going to hell," the church member answered. "What does your new pastor say?" "He keeps saying we're going to hell too." "So, what's the difference?" "Well," the member replied, "when our first pastor said we were going to hell he sounded like he was glad. But when our new pastor says it, he sounds like it is breaking his heart."*
- But maybe the most important reason that Paul wants to stress his sincerity is what he is about to say in:

**Romans 9: 6 – 7** But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,<sup>7</sup> and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring.

- The point that Paul is going to make in the rest of chapter 9 and all the way through to the end of chapter 11 is that the covenant that God made with Abraham does not guarantee the salvation of all of Abraham's biological offspring, that is, every Jew. The ultimate reason why some are accursed and cut off from Christ is that they are not among the elect. He will say in:

**Romans 11:7** Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened.

- As we think about the topics of election and predestination that Paul explains to us in chapters, 9, 10, 11, it is easy for us to fall into the mindset that God is going to do what God is going to do, so there is no point in caring, no point in anguish. Maybe even no point in evangelism because God is going to save who He is going to save. And in a sense that is true. God is going to save His elect whether we feel anguish for the lost or not.
- But as we have already seen Jesus clearly cared about the lost whether they were part of the elect or not. He wept over Jerusalem.

**Luke 19: 41** And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it,<sup>42</sup> saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.

- Jesus commissioned us to go and make disciples of all nations. You won't do that, or at least you will not be effective in trying to do it, unless you have care or concern for those you are trying to reach.
  - Paul knew the sovereignty of God's election, but he still grieved over those who were lost. It was both a love for Christ and a love for others that motivated his missionary zeal. We are not just to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength, we are also to love our neighbor as ourselves.

#### 4. The intensity of Paul's anguish

- Paul's grief is so great over the lostness of Israel that he stands on the brink of damnation, ready to throw himself in, if it were possible. But it is not possible. That's why it says, "I could wish."
  - The reason it's not possible is found four verses earlier in

**Romans 8: 38 – 39** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- Paul knows that his kinsmen are lost and ready to be cast into outer darkness forever. But he does not say that with any sense of casualness, or even any sense of rage or fierceness. He says it with anguish. Anguish so deep that he wishes he could trade places with them.
  - What motivated Paul's ministry, and his evangelistic fervor? Why he was willing to be poured out as a drink offering to the Lord (2 Tim. 4: 6). It was knowing the terror that those he cared about and loved, his countrymen were, to quote C.S. Lewis, in the process of becoming people of such "*a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.*"
- In this life, we should grieve and mourn with anguish over the fate of those who are apart from Christ, but that raises a legitimate question: Will we then be sad throughout eternity because of those who are accursed and cut off from Christ in hell? Will heaven be a place of eternal grief? – the answer is no. "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes . . . neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore" (Rev. 21:4).
  - In Heaven, God's love and glory will overpower grief and sorrow and it will be no more. Those who die in their sinful rebellion – we say it with tears now – will not have the power to hold heaven hostage with their own misery. Here we groan and weep. There we are consumed with the glory of Christ.
- It is a passion for the glory of Christ that motivates missions. For the sake of Christ's glory, we should desire that all would come to worship him.

#### 5. The fruit of Paul's anguish

- Paul's anguish is bearing fruit, first in his own life and then in the lives of others.

**Romans 10:1** Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.

- The fruit of Paul's anguish for his kinsmen who are accursed and cut off from Christ is to desire their salvation and to pray for them to be saved.
  - So, what do we see here? We must not only pray for God to give us a broken heart for the lost, but we must also pray, with passion, for the lost.
- John Knox was born in Scotland about 1514, three years before the start of the Protestant Reformation. In 1543, Knox would become a Protestant, which would bring him into constant conflict with monarchs who were Roman Catholic.
  - When the Roman Catholic Mary Tudor (also known as "Bloody Mary" because of her ruthless persecution of the Protestants) became queen of England, in 1553, Knox was forced to hide. He eventually landed in Geneva where he met John Calvin, who became his mentor.



- Knox returned to Scotland in 1559, the year after Queen “Bloody Mary” died and was succeeded by the Protestant Queen Elizabeth. He remained in Scotland, bringing reformation to the church until his death in 1572.
- Mary, Queen of Scots, was a Roman Catholic monarch who was presiding over what had become Protestant Scotland because of John Knox’s zeal. She once said, “I fear the prayers of John Knox more than all the assembled armies of Europe.”
- Why do you think the Queen said this? Because she saw the impact of Knox’s prayer. From a human point of view, it was the prayer of Knox that sparked the Reformation in Scotland. His prayer shook the land of Scotland, causing a revival among God’s people. Isn’t that what we need?
- Perhaps of all the prayers of Knox, “Give me Scotland, or I die” is the most quoted one and shows his passion and intense desire for the conversion of the people of Scotland. His prayer was an expression of his great confidence in God.
  - His prayer also echoes the Apostle Paul’s prayer in Romans 10:1, “my heart’s desire and prayer for Israel is, that they might be saved.”
  - I wonder if we have the same desire for our family members, our neighbors, our fellow citizens here in Sturgis? Along with asking God to give us a broken heart for the lost, might we too also boldly begin to pray, “Give me Sturgis, or I die?”
- Who is your one? Who is the person you anguish over and long to see come to Jesus? Pray with boldness and ask God to give you that one.
  - If you don’t have one, ask God to break your heart for one who is lost.
- Don’t say: There is no reason to pray for sinners if God is sovereign to save. Say instead, Because God is sovereign to save, I will pray for sinners with hope.
  - Because Paul prayed for their salvation, I will pray.
  - Because Christ prayed on the cross for their salvation, I will pray.
  - Because I have grief and anguish in my heart, I will pray that as Paul writes in:

**2 Timothy 2:25** God may perhaps grant them repentance.

- We have no idea who is elect and who is not, so we grieve and anguish over all who are perishing apart from Christ. Even in this moment, we pray.
  - Every Sunday as we gather to worship, there are some here who are under the guilt of their sins and accursed and cut off from Christ. Pray with me as we close that God will not let them leave here in that state.
- Christ has done for us what Paul only wished he could do. Christ became a curse for us. He has died for our sins and risen from the dead. Trust him as your only hope, your only righteousness, and your all-satisfying treasure.
  - Trust in him and you will be saved. Pray in his name and go in his power and we will see others saved. Amen.