

A Lost Passion

Romans 9:1-5

Someone has said rightly that if you preach into your own heart, you're likely to hit a few others. So as I preach this message today on having a passion for the lost, please don't think that I am perfected in this area. I feel very convicted by what I'm about to share with you.

As I said to those of you who were here at the Wednesday night prayer meeting, when I look at the compassion of Jesus for those who are lost, when I consider the love of God for sinners, and now when I have studied to preach on Paul's deep burden for lost souls in Romans 9—I can't help but be convicted of how far short I fall of God's heart for lost people.

Do we have a passion for lost souls, or have we lost the passion?

Listen for God's heart as I read the words of Paul from Romans 9:1-5,

- 1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,**
- 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.**
- 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,**
- 4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises;**
- 5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.**

Let us pray: Lord, speak to me, that I may speak Your word from Your heart. Lord, speak to all our hearts this morning, reveal Christ to us through your living word. We are here with many needs and many things on our our minds. For many of us, the passion for lost souls is far from the center of our heart. Instead we are overwhelmed by circumstances and trials that we are going through. So, our Father, we pray that for a few moments this morning we would set aside those things if we can, and by Your help we will focus on this great need. Lord, help us we pray, give us a heart for the lost, a heart like our Master's heart. For we ask it in the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd who gave His life for His sheep. Amen.

Today we start a new section of the book of Romans. It's a difficult section in many ways. Some of it is difficult to understand and even if you understand it, some of it is difficult to accept. This section majors on God's relationship with the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. It deals with questions of election, God's sovereignty, human responsibility, God's justice, and God's faithfulness. Paul tackles these issues head-on in Romans 9-11.

What does all this have to do with what we have learned so far in Romans? Really, Romans 9-11 answers some questions that inevitably come up when you preach the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. I am sure that what Paul writes in Romans, he had already preached many times in Jewish synagogues and Gentile cities. And every time he preached this gospel of salvation by faith, there would

be objections, mainly from the Jews. They accused Paul of hating his fellow Jews and of distorting the scriptures. So Paul anticipates the questions and answers them here in this section. So he will start by saying that rather than hating the Jews, he has a great love and passion for them. And rather than distorting the scriptures, he preaches the word of God in truth.

So in this section Paul deals with the question of the Jews. How could God have a plan of salvation for the whole world if his own chosen people have rejected it?

Paul began this letter to the Romans by saying in Romans 1:16-17, **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"**

In Romans Paul has proved that all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, are under sin, are lost, and under the wrath of God. So all need the Savior Jesus. He proved that salvation is by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ both for Jews and Gentiles, in fact for all who come by faith in Jesus Christ.

And he proved that our salvation is secure in Christ. Remember the soaring language that the Apostle used toward the end of Romans 8. **"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

As we saw in Romans 8:28-30, those whom God foreknew He predestined and called and justified and glorified. Wonderful assurance that we have in Christ, Amen? But, as Paul anticipates the objection--Did not just the reverse happen with Israel? Were they not chosen by God? Yet did they not fall into idolatry, and later, were they not captured and exiled? Worse than that, did they not reject the Messiah who came among them in the flesh?

How it is that Israel not only rejected her Messiah but continues in unbelief to the present day? Has God canceled his promises to Israel? Has Israel forfeited her place in God's plan? Have the promises of God somehow failed?

If God and Israel could be separated, then how can we be sure that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus? That's the question raised which Paul answers. In the process, he juggles the tensions with which we deal in daily life. How does a sinner, any sinner come to believe? And, why do some who have sat under the faithful ministry of the gospel for years still reject Christ? If God elects those whom He saves then why do we bother with evangelism and missions? If God elects then is it fair for Him to judge those whom He does not elect?

So this is the theme and the questions that Paul will answer in chapters 9-11. Chapter 9 deals with Israel's past election by God and therefore with God's sovereignty choices. Chapter 10 deals with the Jews present rejection of the Messiah and therefore with human responsibility to believe. Chapter 11 deals with Israel's future restoration and therefore with God's faithfulness to keep His promises.

In the first few verses of chapter 9 we see the heart of Paul for the lost Jews. I hope that today God will also give us a passion for the lost. Ray Pritchard suggests two indispensable qualities that we need to have if we hope to reach people for Jesus. I'm going to borrow his outline.

To have a passion for the lost we need:

1. Great Love (Rom. 9:1-3)

You may say, "I don't see any mention of the love of Christ in 9:1-3." I believe that Christ's love was behind Paul's burden for his lost kinsmen. He has just finished (8:35-39) extolling **"the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."** Paul is willing to be cut off from God if it meant the salvation of the Jews. In 2 Corinthians 5:14, in an evangelistic context, Paul states, **"For the love of Christ compels us...."** Christ's love that reached down to us in our sin should impel us to reach out to other sinners with the good news that if they will trust in Christ, He will save them.

Someone has said, *No one cares how much you know till they know how much you care.* If people don't believe that we care about them, they are not going to care much about what we believe. Or to say it another way, we will never lead people to Jesus until we learn to love people like Jesus does. We see three different aspects of Paul's love in these first three verses.

A. Sincerity.

Let's look again at verse 1: **"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit."** Notice that Paul is appealing to his integrity and like making an oath, calls on Christ as his witness, stating it both positively: **"I speak the truth"** and negatively: **"I am not lying."** Then he mentions that his conscience confirms everything and finally appeals to the Holy Spirit who enlightens and informs his conscience.

Many people today are skeptical of Christians because they have either been conned or have watched a parade of holy hypocrites come and go in their lives. That's why it's so important for us to be sincere and authentic. In a stunning study released by the Barna Group, extensive research among 16 to 29-year-olds has revealed the following:

People are expressing more hostility, doubt, frustration and skepticism toward Christianity - and this is particularly true among young people. Their perceptions of Christians are filled with images of judgmentally, hypocritical lifestyles and political activism...They conclude that Christianity is old-fashioned, boring and unintelligent, and that Christians are insincere and too focused on getting converts. The followers of the Prince of Peace are thought to be unable to live peaceably among others. In just a decade, the perception of evangelicals has become eight times less favorable among young non-Christians when compared to the image held by Boomer non-Christians.

One of the most common reactions that young people have about the faith is that *present-day Christianity is no longer like Jesus intended.*" The authors ask a probing question: *"What if they are reacting - not to our righteous lifestyles - but to our self-righteousness?"* (www.barna.org)

B. Sorrow.

Here Paul shares the intensity of his feelings. **“that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.”** (v. 2). “Sorrow” refers to sadness, while anguish refers to deep personal pain. Paul was not a passive observer, standing by idly while his friends rejected Christ. He saw their unbelief, and it tore at his heart.

In one of his books, Ray Stedman tells the story of a man who said to his friend, “I hear you dismissed your pastor. Why?” “Because he told us we were going to hell.” “What does your new pastor say?” “He says we’re going to hell, too.” “So, what’s the difference?” “When the first pastor said it, he sounded like he was glad about it. When the new man says it, it sounds like it’s breaking his heart.”

We could all stand to have more sorrow for the unsaved. Listen to these different passages.

- When the psalmist sees a disregard for God’s law, a faucet of tears cascade down his cheeks as he writes in Psalm 119:136: **“Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.”**
- Jeremiah, known as the weeping prophet, writes these descriptive words in Jeremiah 9:1: **“Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.”**
- In Matthew 9:36, we see that Jesus was moved deeply when he saw people in distress: **“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”**
- Later, when Jesus came up to Jerusalem for the final time, He broke down in Luke 19:41: **“As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it.”** This word for “wept” literally means that he “convulsed uncontrollably.”
- And in Acts 20:19 and Acts 20:31, Paul recalls the tears he shed in Ephesus: **“I served the Lord with great humility and with tears...Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”**

Where are our tears for those who transgress God’s laws? Why don’t I cry for the unconverted? When will I stop being so selfish and start really caring for non-Christians?

Evangelism will have little effect if we don’t love the lost. Paul’s passion for compassion was sincere and it was sorrowful – and we see next that the lostness of people affected him so much that he was ready to take some sacrificial action.

C. Sacrifice.

Ro 9:3 is without a doubt one of the most stunning statements Paul ever made. **“For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh.”** If it were possible, he would be willing to go to hell if that would mean his Jewish brethren could go to heaven. These words come from a man who loved Christ with all that he had and couldn’t wait to be with Him. And yet, he’s willing to be cursed and cut off for the sake of others. Paul knows that nothing could possibly separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. He’s letting us in on his heart, he would be willing if it were possible to sacrifice himself for his fellow Jews. John Knox shared a similar sense of sacrifice when he declared almost five hundred years ago, **“Give me Scotland or I die!”**

Paul's passion here seems to be modeled after Moses when he prayed that God would not punish the Israelites for their ugly idol worship in Exodus 32:32: ***"But now, please forgive their sin--but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."*** That's a man who cared for his people.

Here are some good questions to ponder. How far will you go to see your friends come to Jesus? What sacrifices will you make? What are you willing to give up so that others may be saved? Do you see people as Jesus does? Do you really see them or do you look past them, like I so often do? Do you love them?

So we need a great love to reach the lost. Second, we need a

2. Great Respect (Rom. 9:4-5)

See how Paul refers to his Jewish brethren in these verses. He calls them "my brothers, my own people, the nation of Israel" (v. 3). Then he lists the eight great advantages God gave the Jewish people.

A. Find connecting points.

Instead of blasting unbelievers, Paul recounts the blessings that the Israelites have received. This is a key ingredient to effective evangelism: Find a point of connection with those who don't yet know Christ.

Paul works hard at creating closeness and establishing common ground. God has given seven great privileges to the Jewish people.

- **Adoption as sons.** In Deuteronomy 7:6 we read this: ***"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession."***
- **The divine glory.** The glory of God is the physical manifestation of God's presence and was what led Israel across the wilderness and filled the tabernacle and then filled the Temple.
- **The covenants.** God made several covenants with His people, through Abraham, Moses and David. Jeremiah 31:31 also describes a ***"new covenant"*** that believers now enjoy because of Jesus.
- **The receiving of the Law.** The Law was a treasure because in it God had revealed Himself and His people had a way to govern their lives.
- **The temple worship.** Israel was given the privilege of serving God through the Tabernacle and later on in the Temple. What an honor for the people to know how to approach God!
- **The promises.** God is faithful to keep His promises.
- **The patriarchs.** Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons formed the foundation of the nation.

It's so easy for us to become arrogant and argumentative when we speak with people who do not yet know Christ. Have you ever tried to argue someone into the kingdom of heaven? It doesn't work, does it? Arguing just makes people angry.

Instead, let's start by loving and respecting people. Make sure your friends know that you have a broken heart for them. Listen. If Hell is real, and it is, then it ought to tear us up. We better have some tears for those who are headed to Hell. If we can laugh about someone going there, or just not care about them, then we don't have the heart of Paul...or of Jesus.

Let's begin with a focus on areas of agreement and then move the conversation to a discussion about Christ, which is what really matters anyway.

B. Focus on Christ.

After finding connecting points, then we're to focus on Christ. Look at how Paul does this in the last part of verse 5: ***"...and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."*** The greatest privilege the nation of Israel had was that the Messiah was born as the son of David, the ultimate promise...and yet they didn't receive God's provision. Jesus was Jewish, of the tribe of Judah, born according to the law, the fulfillment of prophecy. If Jesus were not Jewish he would not qualify as the promised Messiah and believing Gentiles (like us) would remain strangers and aliens without hope and without God (Ephesians 2:12).

Jesus is both God and man. According to His human nature, He came from the line of the Jews (see the genealogy in Matthew 1:1-18). According to His divine nature, He is from eternity (John 1:1-3). And He is Lord: ***"God over all."***

It's Time to Try Tears

The founder of the Salvation Army was General William Booth. Some of his salvation soldiers were sent into the ghettos of Los Angeles in the 1920s and after three years of no results, they sent Booth a telegram: *"It just won't work. We have tried everything. The gospel is just not being received here."* A couple days later they received a two-word telegram from General Booth that said, *"Try tears."*

It's time for us to try tears! When's the last time you had great sorrow for someone's soul? Do you have unceasing anguish for your closest friends and family members? While it's important for non-Christians to know "where we stand" we can sometimes come across as rigid and judgmental. Wouldn't it be better if along with knowing where we stand that lost people know that we love them and that we fall to our knees and cry for their conversion? Has it been awhile since you tried tears?

I've spent a lot of time talking to believers today. There are actually three groups of people here today – believers, non-believers and make-believers. Which group are you in? What about your own soul? Are you saved? If you were to die this afternoon, are you certain that you'd go to heaven? You may be religious like Paul's relatives, but do you have a saving relationship with Jesus? Jesus is "God over all." Is He Lord of your life?