

Sinking Ship. Patient Saviour

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we're continuing on with our series, All kinds of Prayer for All kinds of People. Last Sunday, we talked specifically about praying for one another, praying for our church.

This morning, we're going to turn our focus outward and talk about how do we pray for unbelievers, people who don't believe in Jesus.

Hopefully, you have some of those people in your life. Most of us do. What is God's will for the unbelievers in our lives? We've talked a little bit about this already in this series so far, and I think we all probably know the right answer.

God desires for all people to be saved. But I think we wrestle with that at times. We pray for people in our lives who don't know Christ that they would be saved.

And we wait, and we pray some more, and we wait. And sometimes we wonder, or start to wonder, does God really desire to save all people? If He does, why hasn't He saved the person that I'm praying for?

[1 : 18] And so, we're going to dig into this a little bit this morning. And we're going to try to anchor our thinking and our praying clearly in the truth of God's Word.

And so, we're going to begin with the Apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3. 2 Peter 3. If you have your Bibles, please open them up.

Beginning in verse 3. Above all, you must understand that in the last day, scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.

They will say, Where is this coming, He promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. Peter tells us that there will be people who mock us for believing in Jesus.

There will be people who mock the promise that Christ has given us, that He is coming back. It's been a long time. Where is He?

[2 : 35] Things just seem to keep going on and on, just as they always have. Where is He? I'll tell you where He is.

Jesus is just the stuff of myth and legend. That's why He's not coming. That's why we haven't seen or heard from Him. All of this stuff in the Bible, that was just made up by people.

It's a crutch for the hopeless and the weak to lean on to help them get through life. But, says Peter, verse 5, they deliberately forget that long ago, by God's word, the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water.

By these waters also, the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

Peter says, they deliberately forget. What does that mean? Typically, when we forget, it's accidental.

[3 : 59] It's unintentional. We'd probably be happy most times to remember everything. Peter is talking about a different kind of forgetting here. He says, they deliberately forget.

There are people alive on our planet today who don't know the truth about how the world began. And the reason for it, says Peter, is because somewhere along the way, their ancestors made a choice to deliberately forget.

they knew the truth and they made a choice to cover it up, to hide it. We tend to do that, especially when it comes to things that show where we are at fault.

There's something in human history that we're ashamed of that looks bad, that makes us look bad. And if we just stop talking about it, then hopefully in generations to come, they'll completely forget about it.

In each generation, God's people have proclaimed His word, the truth that God created the world. Jesus is the Messiah.

[5 : 23] He is the one that we need. And in every generation, a new generation, rises up to play their part in deliberately forgetting.

Paul calls this suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. Scoffing and mocking is difficult. We don't want that. But, if I understand Jesus and the apostles, there will be a time in the future when it gets even worse for those of us who believe.

Peter gives us a word of encouragement for when that happens. And for those moments, he says this in verse 8, but do not forget this one thing.

Dear friends, with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years. And a thousand years is like a day.

[6 : 35] The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise. As some understand slowness. Instead, He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

We tend to measure the passage of time by the span of our lives or the span of human history.

But God's sense on how time is passing is different than ours. He's eternal. He has always existed. It's only been a couple days by His sense of things since Christ was first here.

And when Jesus comes back, He will be right on time. But we are not good at waiting.

We are not good when it comes to patience. We get impatient even when the website takes a few seconds longer to load. And as the persecution and scoffing and mocking gets even worse, as we see that it may, we may even come to the place where we also are saying, God, where is the coming that you promised?

[8 : 16] How long do we have to wait? It's been 2,000 years already. Why the delay? Peter says, listen, the reason why Christ doesn't come back yet is not because He's procrastinating.

It's not because He's thinking, oh, yeah, one of these days I've got to go back and deal with earth, finish what I started there, keep my promises. He says, no, it's not procrastination, it's because He is patient.

He is waiting for something, says Peter. Waiting for what? He is waiting for more people to be saved.

our world is on a ship that is sinking towards judgment, towards destruction.

And here we are as believers in the lifeboat. We're safe and we're saying, come on, God, let's get out of here already.

[9 : 25] Let's go home. Get us back to land. And God is saying, no, not yet. There are more people yet to be saved.

In our impatience, we just want to hit the red button and we've got lots of people in the boat. Let's go. But the truth is that the Lord desires to save people even more than we do.

He is committed to saving people even more than we are. Peter kind of summarizes this truth in verse 15.

He says this, bear in mind then that our Lord's patience means salvation. That more people will be saved.

Just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. We already looked a little bit at what Paul said in his letter to Timothy.

[10 : 30] That's where we started this series. I want you to pray all kinds of prayers for all kinds of people. Why? For this is good and pleases God, our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Amen. it's crystal clear. The Lord's heart, His desire is that all would be saved.

And so we can pray with confidence for the salvation of people in our lives who don't believe. If God has clearly said it is my will that everyone be saved, then we can pray with confidence that God would save the people in our lives who don't believe.

Period. In fact, Paul actually prays for the salvation of other people. If you have your Bibles with you, turn to Romans chapter 10.

Romans chapter 10 verse 1. Verse 1. Paul says this, Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

[12 : 05] He's been praying for his fellow Jewish people that God would save them literally for their salvation.

If Paul prays that way, so should we with confidence. Even if it seems like we've been praying for years and the answer has not come.

Part of me wants to end the sermon there. That's kind of the definitive word, the place that we need to come down on when it comes to the unbelievers in our lives.

We should be praying for God to save them, asking God to save them. That's his will. But I know that we all have that question kind of rumbling around somewhere inside of us.

If God's desire is to save everyone, why doesn't he? why doesn't he just do it?

[13:32] God's desire with the rest of us this morning I'm going to do my best to answer that or to point us to the answer of that question.

we start with the simple truth that not everyone is saved. Even though God desires to save, that everyone be saved, not everyone is saved.

There are some people who believe that everybody will be saved. They're called Christian universalists. They believe that at the end, ultimately, Jesus is going to somehow bring all of humanity into the fold.

And everybody will be restored to a right relationship with God. And part of the reason they believe that is because they just how can God be loving and yet allow some to perish?

They wrestle with that. And so that's kind of the conclusion that they've come to. The problem with that is that it's not what Jesus taught. Jesus said this.

[14:43] He said, enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.

There is another occasion which Luke records in his gospel, Luke chapter 13, verse 23. He was asked, Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?

The question doesn't really get any clearer than that. And Jesus' answer was, make every effort to enter through the narrow door because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

And then he goes on to talk about how there will come a time where it's too late and people will be turned away from the door. The time is up and they will be sent away into everlasting punishment.

the truth that Jesus taught is clear. Not everyone will be saved. In fact, relative to the number of people that there are in our world, only a few will be saved.

[16:04] Many will perish. Should that stop us from praying for God to save certain people?

Absolutely not. It didn't stop Paul from praying for the salvation of people. In fact, if we go back to Romans 10, right after he tells us that he prays for the salvation of his fellow Jewish people.

Not right after, but soon after. In chapter 11, verse 25, he says this, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited.

Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. The implications of that are God has some kind of a plan here.

He has a number of people that he desires to save from among those who are not Jewish. And until that happens, the Jewish people are going through a hardening.

[17:21] And yet, Paul still prays for their salvation. God has to be to God to God can keep his promise when it looks like all of his people have rejected him, mainly the Jews.

And he says that even while many have rejected, there is still a remnant. In 11, verse 5, he says, so too at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace.

There are some who have believed and accepted Jesus as their Messiah from among the Jewish people and the rest have been hardened.

That doesn't stop Paul for praying that God would save, even though he knew that it wasn't in God's plan that every single person that he prayed for necessarily would be.

How did Paul pray for the salvation of other people I want you to look for a minute at Romans 9 verse 1 this really moved me he says this I speak the truth in Christ I am not lying my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart for I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people those of my own race the people of Israel if I could he says I would trade my own salvation my own place in the life boat for all of theirs if I could I would give up my own place in the kingdom of

[19:35] Christ for all of theirs that's the heart and the attitude of Paul as he prays and asks God to save his fellow Jewish people the Jewish people he knows in his life which brings us back to that question if God desires to save everyone why doesn't he why doesn't he this is a difficult question and the answer of some is that the reason that he doesn't is because in some sense he is not able to it's up to the individuals to choose think of Jesus on the life boat throwing the rope out to the

people that are sinking on the ship it's up to them to grab onto the rope if

God was to to to make them or to do that for them it would undermine their their freedom their choices would no longer be real their love would not be genuine because they were made to do that kind of reduces them to robots some have said God is a gentleman he doesn't force anyone to do anything but this line of thinking has some pretty serious implications especially when it comes to praying for people's salvation what is it that you are asking God to do when you ask him to save someone if you're not asking God to intervene in that person's life and prevent them from making a terrible mistake a horrible decision if you're not asking

God to change their heart and whatever it takes to pull them away from that choice that they would make then what are you asking God to do for them when you pray for their salvation in all my years of being a Christian I have almost never heard anybody pray for a person to be saved like this father in heaven I pray that you would make the conditions right and favorable so that so and so would come to a place where they can make the choice to believe in you but at the end of the day I know that whether they are saved is not up to you Lord it's up to them and so at least make the conditions right so that it's clear in their minds just who they are either accepting or rejecting but thank you that you have given them true freedom to choose between eternal life and eternal punishment

I've never heard anybody pray that and I think part of the reason is because nobody deep down inside really believes that that's how it is between God and us this picture of us on the lifeboat with Jesus throwing out the rope is not really the picture of the New Testament the picture in the New Testament that we get of salvation is Jesus gets out of the lifeboat swims onto the ship sees us there unconscious dead on the deck ties the rope around us brings us back to life as a gift of grace and once we're alive we're too weak to even hold on to the rope so he grabs our hand in his and squeezes it onto that rope and carries us all the way through till we get back to safety that's the picture I see of salvation in the New Testament do we really believe that

God's hands are somehow tied by our freedom by our will because if we do the implications for this go beyond just praying for salvation they ripple through to praying for other people about anything I mean what what do we really expect God to do for people if he can't interfere with their freedom to choose can we pray and ask God to send workers into the harvest if ultimately it's not up to him whether they go or not it's up to them can we pray and ask God to change someone's heart would that not also be a violation of their freedom to choose if this is how it is between God and us it doesn't make sense to pray and ask

[25 : 04] God to save people because we be asking God to do something that he can't ultimately in the full sense do for that person wouldn't it make more sense for us to go to those people that we love that we want to be saved and to ask them to do what God can't do for them and receive the gift I think Paul does give us an answer here why doesn't God just save everybody God his answer is here it's specific to Israel in this case but it applies more generally and even as Paul gives us his answer or at least what leads to the answer he admits that we're going to have problems with it that we're not going to like it that we're going to have objections and that if we try to accept what he says what he's about to say about

God and how he deals with us we're going to accuse him of being unjust I'm going to read it for you Romans chapter 9 verse 10 these are Paul's words not mine Rebecca's children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad in order that God's purpose in election might stand not by works but by him who calls she was told the older will serve the younger just as it is written Jacob I loved but Esau I hated what then shall we say is God unjust not at all for he says to Moses I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom

I have compassion it does not therefore depend on human desire or effort but on God's mercy for scripture says to Pharaoh I raised you up for this very purpose that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and he hardens whom he wants to harden one of you will say to me well then why does God still blame us for who's able to resist his will but who are you oh man to talk back to God shall what is formed say to the one who formed it why did you make me like this does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use as

I said before many don't like this answer there's a reason why many choose a different answer to the question of why God doesn't save everyone but I think that this is God's answer the reason he doesn't save everyone is that he has his own good and wise and right and holy reasons he has the freedom he says to show compassion and mercy to some and not to others he has the right to set apart some for a special purpose but to allow others to receive what they deserve for their sins and it's not your place or mine to take

God and put him on trial and evaluate whether he is unjust or just in doing this in the decisions he makes here whether he is good or evil back to Israel in chapter 11 verse 7 Paul had said they were hardened why were they hardened what then what the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain the elect among them did but the others were hardened as it is written God gave them a spirit of stupor eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear to this very day the reason that they were not saved is not because God was trying to preserve their freedom but because

[30 : 36] God hardened them that was his decision to make injustice and yet knowing all of this Paul still says that he prays for their salvation we must not make the mistake of assuming that because of all of this you know if God knows who's and already decided who's going to be saved and who hasn't then what's the point of prayer what's the point of sharing the gospel that didn't stop Paul from praying with tears and in anguish that they would be saved the way that God's will relates to ours is a mystery somehow he has woven each one of us into the story as truly responsible choosers our choices are real they have real impact they have real significance our prayers have real weight and bearing on how things go in the story and yet amazingly

God is still sovereignly directing and overseeing all of it we can't understand how that's possible but in everything the Lord is totally innocent and pure of all evil and he gets all the credit 100% for our salvation start to finish there will be no boasting on our part at the end and so don't make the mistake of assuming that God will somehow just because he's decided to save people without your praying for them without your sharing Christ with them listen to what Paul says sandwiched in the middle of all this Romans chapter 10 verse 13 he says everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved how then can they call on the one they have not believed in and how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard and how can they hear without someone preaching to them our witness matters our prayers for people to be saved matter

God really does hear and answer our prayers and so just like Paul we should pray for the salvation of the people in our lives we should not assume that God will somehow save them without them and so as I've been encouraging in the last weeks I would encourage with this as well keep a list of at least five people in your life that are not believers and pray for them that God would save them every week that list may change from time to time but pray for them father in heaven we bow before you and acknowledge that you are the Lord you are God and we are not Lord we can't trade our salvation for others we are truly at your mercy as your creatures but we know that you are a good and compassionate

God and you have said that you desire to save people give us confidence and courage both to bear witness to Christ but also to ask you for this good gift for the people in our lives in Christ's name Amen