

Romans 9: 1-5

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[0 : 00] 9. Romans chapter 9 and we're going to look at the opening verses. Verses 1 to 5. And what I want to do with this is just look at some lessons from Paul's own burden for the salvation of his people. And what we hope to do is to see the principles that motivated him, that made him have this tremendous heart's longing for the salvation of Israel for the Jewish people. Now as all of you, almost all of you anyway know, we had a week in Edinburgh at the General Assembly. And one of the things that pleased me very much about the whole approach the moderator had to reading the Bible, we had opening devotions. And one of the things that was really pleasing to hear him say repeatedly, that when he finished reading the word, he would say, this is the word of God, the inherent word of God. He kept saying that and it was noticeable. And it was really pleasing to hear him make that emphasis that the Bible we have, the scriptures of the Old and New Testament constitute the very word of God to us, albeit through human authors who were moved by the Spirit. And we ought never to lose sight of that. The scriptures, those of you who know what we call our subordinate standards, the Westminster Confession of Faith, you'll know that it is subordinate to the Bible. The Bible has first place. And the standards, the doctrines that we have in our confession are based on the Bible.

Because the Bible is, when all is said and done, the living word of the living God. Yes, we know that our human authors, but we know too that the real author working through these men is the Spirit of the living God.

Now, I'm saying that simply because we're thinking here about Paul and his burden for his people. And it is quite apparent that in his mind's eye, the first thing is, he's a man of the truth. He's a man of the truth of the Bible. I tell the truth in Christ. I am not lying. So, we're thinking and reminding ourselves by way of introduction about this Bible.

Paul, Paul, of course, in his day, the bulk of the Bible they had then was the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. And then they began to write the Gospels and the letters.

[3 : 11] And Romans, of course, is one of Paul's letters. And the wonderful thing about Scripture is the Spirit of God allowed the person to come through here and there.

So that you get to know, I can't say you get to know all the writers, because some of them we don't know by name, like the chroniclers in the Old Testament and the kings, the book of kings and so on. But you get to know the writer by listening to what they say. And God allowed that to happen. God allowed the traits and the characteristics of people to come through.

And I think nowhere do you see that more clearly than in the Apostle Paul. Those of us who have studied 2 Corinthians in depth, we know very well that of all Paul's letters, 2 Corinthians lets us into his inner life more than any other.

But even here, in this passage, this is perhaps one of the outstanding passages that allows us into what we might call the inner sanctuary of Paul's heart.

[4 : 32] We get into his sanctified heart, a heart made holy by the Spirit of God. And we get in there and we learn what he was like. We learn something about him.

We learn about the transformation Christ made, Jesus made in his life. Most of us, if not all of us here today, know very well that at one time he was Saul the Pharisee.

He was emphatically a learned man, a rabbi. He was a top flight communicator and somebody who was stabbed full of knowledge and the application of that knowledge of the Jewish religion.

He stood out in the front. He tells us that himself. They all know me like this. He was energetic and proactive in his work within Judaism.

And we know too by his own testimony, he was thoroughly anti-Christian. He was anti the followers of Jesus.

[5 : 43] He tells us, he said, I thought I ought to do many things against Jesus of Nazareth and his followers. But that same Jesus changed him, transformed him.

And what the Spirit of God did, the Spirit of Christ did in changing Paul, Saul into Paul, so to speak, is that he took all those natural gifts and abilities and he ennobled them.

And he took by his grace this man and he gave him more gifts, spiritual gifts, so that he became a mighty apostle to the Gentiles first, to kings and rulers, you find it in Acts 9 and verse 15, and to Israel.

His priority was to be to the Gentiles in the sense that he was an apostle to the Gentiles. But the interesting thing is, although that was his set-apartness to go to the Gentiles, yet actually his priority was always to his own people.

The gospel was for the Jew first. And Paul never lost that sense of priority. You read the book of Acts, and you find him always looking for a synagogue to go and to expound the Hebrew Scriptures, showing them, proving to them, that this Messiah promised, this great King, this great Savior, is actually Jesus of Nazareth.

[7 : 35] That was his whole approach. But in the text before us, the passage before us, what we actually find is how Paul thought in relation to his people.

How he was burdened for them. And the first thing we want to look at is at Paul's passion for the truth in Christ.

Yet this great passion for the truth in Christ, and that formed and informed his whole approach to his people. And to the Gentiles, of course, and to kings and rulers to whom he testified.

First of all, in Paul's passion for the truth, that is the gospel truth, the truth in Christ. And what we want to do here is to notice that again and again, it comes out in the letters of Paul, that the truth of God, the truth in Christ, was key.

It was most important. You find him, when he had, remember, he went to the Galatians early on in his apostolic ministry.

[8 : 54] And the Galatians, although they had received the word, some of them were changing. You remember the story of how Judaizers came up, the Christ plus, the Jewish laws, the ceremonies and all that.

The Christ plus folk came up pretending to have come from James and the other apostles in Jerusalem. And they were infiltrating the churches and they were saying, except you apply circumcision, except you apply the Jewish codes, you cannot be saved.

So it was Christ plus. And Paul had to deal with that. And many in the churches in Galatia turned against him or were on the brink of turning against him.

And he says to them, think back, think back to when I came to you at first. I told you the truth. Why are you treating me like this now?

You find the passage I'm referring to in Galatians 4, verses 14, 15, 16. He says to them, I was there among you and you received me as a messenger of God, a man who told you the truth.

[10 : 09] I say that because, you see, I tell you the truth in Christ. Paul was informed and he was filled with his passion because of the truth in Christ.

He wrote from a jail when he was in prison, he wrote to the Philippians that he was there in the prison. For this purpose, I am set forth for the defense of the gospel.

And he talks there about himself as being an apologist. For that's what the word defense means in the Greek. He was an apologist for the truth of the gospel.

You find it in Philippians 1, and verse 7. And you find him when the Colossians were on the slide. They were influenced by philosophy. They were influenced by the intricacies of the philosophical schools. And they wanted to sort of bring philosophy in.

[11 : 21] And he said, this will only cloud your minds. And it will take you away from the true wisdom in Christ found.

And he warned them to turn away from dangerous philosophy, from pseudo-knowledge, which will take you away from the truth in Christ.

You find that both in Colossians 1 and in chapter 2 as well. We're studying in our regular Bible studies here we're studying in 1 Thessalonians in the mornings.

And we've noticed how Paul emphasized that the change that came over the Thessalonians was because of the truth of God coming to them in the power of the Spirit.

So Paul was himself a man of the truth. The truth mattered to him. It had transformed him. And so, when we think about his burden for the Jews, we begin by thinking about a man who was committed to the truth of God in Christ.

[12:32] I tell you the truth in Christ. But he doesn't leave it there. He says, conscience is united in the Holy Spirit.

I can look up, as it were, I can look God in the face and I know I'm telling the truth. My conscience is confirmed by the Holy Spirit on this.

You see, he says that. I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness, not full stop, if you look at it, in the Holy Spirit.

there's no lies here. He is committed and he knows he can appeal to the Spirit of God.

Remember, Jesus called the Spirit of God the Spirit of Truth. And for all who would hear and read the Apostle, all who would listen to him and all who would read his letters, he had this to say, I am completely and utterly committed to the truth in Christ.

[13:48] And my dear friends, there's a practical lesson for you and me in this. We'll never be burdened, we'll never be full in our hearts of longing to share the good news except the truth has really gripped ourselves.

and listen to what I say here. What may have been true of us about us 10 years ago or 20 years ago or 30 years ago or 40 years ago if we can go back like that, somebody can go back further. It's not what the truth meant to us in Jesus then, it's what it means to us still. And we have to look into our hearts and say, am I moved by the truth in Christ as I once was?

And I rather think you'll have to say, actually, not really. My dear friends in the Lord who have been on the road a long time, life in its hard knocks and life in its storms in our experience can dull our sense of the wonder of the truth in Christ.

and it's good for us to pause and consider the apostles' abiding passion for the truth in Christ. You read him from the Damascus road or at least Straight Street, Damascus where Ananias came and the Spirit brought him through.

[15:22] You read him from there to his journey's end and he was passionate for the truth in Christ. and that secondly gave Paul an intense love for the Jews.

Now, those of you who are very smart on this are saying, well, actually, there's no mention of the word love in the passage and I grant that's true. But you can't read the words of our text and say to me there's no evidence for Paul's intense love here.

Listen. Listen. My conscience bears witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart for I could wish that I myself were eternally condemned.

for that's what accursed means. From Christ for my brethren. Friends, if that's not about love, what is?

Actually, it is about love and it's about an interesting and neglected side of true love. What do I mean? It means that the Bible tells us that in this fallen sinful world there is a negative neglected side of love that's important to know about and to realize.

[17:04] That is what I will call the pain side of love. Love's anguish. You go to the book of Acts and in chapter 14 from 1 through to 20 you get an example of what Paul experienced at the hands of men.

And yet the wonderful thing is although people mistreated and abused Paul as he sought to bring them to Christ, all that they did against him to sniff out any love for them, it didn't work.

Paul still yearned for their salvation. He had this great sorrow and then ceasing anguish in his heart for them.

And there's a good practical lesson in this for us because from our standpoint we need to remind ourselves that all true love and particularly all heaven born love, the love that God has put in us if we're Christ today.

He's put it in us by his spirit. And in that sense all true love has anguish in it. And it has anguish in it when that love is rejected or it's neglected or it's simply refused.

[18:33] You can look at that in the human situation. You're wise and our time's whizzing on. But you can look at it in the human situation. But it is true in relation to seeking the salvation of people when that offer is rejected, when it is refused, when it is neglected.

The refrain in scripture about many of the Israelites is that for all the wonders they saw they believed him not nor trusted in him.

And there is ample evidence in scripture that it pained the Lord. Now I'm not getting into the theological hot potato of God in his own personal suffering.

We're leaving that out but I'm going as far as this because I can because the Bible allows me whenever God wants to communicate to us in human language about how he feels.

He uses words that we can understand. It pained him. It grieved him. He was in anguish. Oh Israel how can I give you it? My inner being yearns for you.

[19 : 52] And so on. And nowhere is that seen more clearly to let me push this a bit further. Nowhere is it seen more clearly than in our own blessed Lord's experience.

If you've been to Jerusalem and you've stood on the Mount of Olives looking across the Kidron Valley to the old city from what's called the Tear Church.

There's a church built where the wrecking was the spot where Jesus looked over and he said oh Jerusalem Jerusalem that kills the prophets and stone those who were sent to you.

How often would I have gathered you as a mother hen gathers your chickens? But you were not willing. Behold your house is left desolate.

Now my dear friends you can't read those words, you can't meditate on those words without feeling the feeling of the Savior without entering in to some extent to the felt pain to the anguish of his heart over a refusing people, a rejecting people over people who have neglected their opportunity.

[21 : 16] You did not know that this was your day of opportunity. He said that. And you see we're living in the days of opportunity for people and we can't be heartless about it.

We look at them young and they're going and they're thinking it's all about making merry or making many and spending it on this trip or that trip or the next.

And all too soon they'll be fleshed out into eternity lost. No you see Paul was caught up with this. He was caught up with the Savior's own intense love for his people.

He came to his own. And whether it is Jerusalem and the Jerusalemites or Peter's denial or Judas' betrayer my own familiar friend has lifted up his heel against me.

Jesus had love's anguish too. And Paul who was an imitator of Jesus had that same intense love for his people.

[22 : 36] And we need that. And we lose that because of the hardness not only of people's hearts but of our own.

We get just bogged down with our own cares and we lose the intensity of love for people. We lose the anguish side of it, the pain side of it. I don't mean necessarily we lose it completely but it is dealt with our own cares.

And we need to as it were recapture that, seek the Lord that we may have something more of that intense love for people not forgetting the Jewish people.

And the last thing we want to consider very briefly is Paul's true loyalism. He was loyal to his people.

He says here, you can almost feel this coming through if you read it again. He says verse 2, For I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.

[23 : 43] Then he says, For I could wish that I myself were accursed anathema from Christ, separated eternally from Christ. For my brethren.

Now, Paul very often uses the expression brethren or brothers for his relationship to the Lord's people. But here, interestingly and revealingly, he uses it with reference to his own folk, as we would say in Scotland, to those who are Jews like himself.

And that's very revealing. He was loyal to them, despite what they were in themselves, as those who rejected or refused the salvation of God and Jesus or neglected their opportunity.

But the first thing I want to say in looking more closely at this as we finish, as to Paul's true loyalism, is this. The Bible tells us it's good to be loyal, to be faithful people.

But we can be sometimes loyal to bad causes. I'm not getting into how you voted at the recent general election. But politics is an area where you can see people can sometimes align themselves to a bad cause.

[25 : 18] There are many policies we can find that is a bad cause. It's a hopeless cause and so on.

Or we can be nationalistic over much. Historians will tell you that when the rise of nationalism occurs, wars are not far away.

And because people want to advance their territories at the expense of others. So that people can be loyal to a bad cause. It's true also in religion too.

We can be very loyal to a bad cause of religion because we're mistaken. We can be loyal to friends who are not worthy of our loyalty.

And by that I mean they're not real friends to us. The Bible tells us we need to choose our friends wisely. Do they help me help others on the Christian way?

[26 : 24] Because if they don't they're not true friends. They're not loyal to me. We have to examine what it is to be loyal to a good cause.

And interestingly see Paul is comfortable with the view that he was loyal to his people. They are still when all is said and done my brethren my countrymen verse 3 who are Israelites.

and there's something very touching about this. The Lord's people whether they're from the far east or the south or the north or the west they are one family in the Lord Jesus Christ.

They're brothers and sisters together in Jesus and there's a oneness that nothing can take away.

But it doesn't follow that we have nothing to do anymore with those who are our own kinfolk whether it is Scottish or English or Bulgarian or Stanislav or our friends from distant places Japan and China or whatever.

There is something here in Paul he was truly loyal to his people but it was loyal with reference to his intense love for them that for all their resistance to the message of Jesus he wanted he persevered he was burdened that they might know the truth in Christ and from that we can learn I don't suppose any of us here today would dare say and that I could wish myself eternally cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren that's a profound thing to wish himself cast into hell forever so that this one and this one and this one and this one might be in heaven what a challenge what a profound challenge you remember that

[28 : 52] Moses many centuries before Paul said when he thought that God was going to finish with Israel right scrap them let them perish and he allowed Moses to intercede for them and what did Moses use as one of his arguments Lord I'm paraphrasing here Lord if it will make the difference blot me out of your book I care that much blot me out write them in and blot me out that's the real stuff that we are to aspire to that's a profound lesson we can learn from the great apostle and from Moses before him and those people you see had set themselves against Paul they chased him from city to city we've been looking at our study in

Thessalonians how when he got over to Macedonia they were hounding him they were going after him from city to city staring at the people against him they did the same in Asia Minor and yet he persisted in his loyalty to them in his intense love for them albeit that that that anguish side of his love comes through I have great sorrow and continual anguish of heart for them who are my people the closer we are therefore to the Lord Jesus Christ as Paul certainly was the more caring we should be and become because

Paul modeled himself on the Lord Jesus Christ and we are to do the same and that will give us an intense love for the people to whom the gospel first came to the Jewish people and it will give us an intense love too for those around us whether it is family or friends or neighbors or work colleagues or whatever and I would suspect if you're like me you need to learn more from this apostle in love for the truth in Christ and intense love for the lost and that loyalty he had that kept him going on seeking their salvation may that be true of us today

Amen With to