

Series on The Prayers of the Apostle Paul
Romans 10:1-4
Sermon #14
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PAUL'S HEART DESIRE AND PRAYER
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Alright. This morning I am going to ask you to turn to Romans 10.

For those of you who are visiting with us, we are looking at "The Prayers of the Apostle Paul," and going through his epistles as much chronologically as we can. We have been through 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians, and now we come to the Book of Romans. Last Sunday we had Paul's prayer at the beginning of this wonderful epistle. The statement that we have in Romans 10 is not actually a prayer, as such, but here Paul told the Roman church what his prayer was for Israel. As you can see at the beginning of chapter 10, he says: "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:1-4).

I want to put this prayer in the context of what the Apostle Paul was saying. I think most of you know that Romans 9, 10 and 11 form a unit of the Book of Romans. In our Sunday School lesson this morning we were focusing attention on Romans 8. We had no idea that I would be in 10 when we got to this Sunday School lesson. But you know that it is in this section of Romans that the Apostle Paul has a great deal to say about election. Many people who hear about the doctrine of election are critical of it because they say that if you believe in election, you believe that God has chosen those who are going to be saved, which is the teaching of Scripture, that you will not pray for the salvation of the lost, nor will you witness. They hold the doctrine of election as opposed to the doctrine of prayer and the doctrine of witnessing. So many believe that if God has chosen those who are going to be saved, then He is going to do it all and there is nothing for us to do. This prayer of the Apostle Paul shows that such criticism is not only not justified, but it is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. I think that those of you who rejoice in the doctrine of election and have embraced it from the heart know that if it does anything as far as the world is concerned, it increases your desire to see people saved, and increases the burden that you have for prayer.

In just looking at this section very briefly, because I do want to spend most of the time on prayer, if you look back to chapter 9--I am going to be speaking about the first part of it in just a moment--but in verses 4 and 5 the Apostle Paul mentions the many blessings that God has poured out upon the nation Israel: "...the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the promises; "Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever." But then he is faced with the question that not every Jew was being saved. We know that from the Old

Testament as well as from the New Testament. So he raises the question in verse 6, "Does this mean that the Word of God has not been effective and that it might be possible that people are able to resist God so that He is not able to do what He set out to do?" Then Paul explains that it never was God's purpose to save every Jew. He explains, as you can see in verses 6 and 7 (the second part of verse 6), that "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called." That means that just because a person is a natural descendant of Abraham does not mean that salvation is guaranteed for him because, as you look at the descendants of Abraham, you see that God has saved some, but He has not saved all, and he gives us some illustrations as you look on down in that chapter. He saved Isaac, but he did not save Ishmael. He saved Jacob, but he did not save Esau. The explanation that the Apostle Paul is giving, we find there in verse 11 (a parenthesis in the King James translation) where he is talking about Jacob and Esau and he says, "(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth.)" It was announced to the parents of these twins that the elder would serve the younger, that God's blessing was going to be upon the younger one, and he quotes from Malachi where we read that God said, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated (rejected)." (Rom. 9:13). So, even as far back as the second chapter, you remember that the Apostle Paul said, "He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Romans 2:28-29).

God has, in His infinite wisdom--and we have to recognize that He is infinitely wise and infinitely good and infinitely powerful, perfectly capable of accomplishing every purpose that He has set out to do--is doing just exactly as He said that He would.

Now turn over to chapter 11 for another brief word where Paul says in verses 25 and 26: "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved..." You see, from his explanation he has told us in these chapters that he is using the name Israel in two ways: He is using it to apply to the whole nation, the natural descendants of Abraham, but on the other hand he is using it to designate that part of Israel which has been chosen of God for salvation. This is what he means when he says, "And so all Israel, all of the elect, all of the chosen of Israel, shall be saved." He is not saying that every Jew is going to be saved, but His elect people among Israel will be. The same, of course, is true as far as the Gentiles are concerned.

I go over this because I want you to see the prayer in the light of this context, and to see when you find the way in which Paul expresses his burden for the people of Israel. He does it in the light of what he has been saying about the doctrine of election. We see from this that God gave the Apostle Paul a burden which I think I can say with assurance that not a single person in this room has this morning. Paul knew more about salvation than anybody living at the time, and perhaps we could say he knew more about salvation than anybody who has ever lived, with the exception of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Tom Matthews was going over Romans 8 this morning, I was thinking, "You know, none of us could have written a chapter like that." There are things about the chapter that none of us fully understand, but the Apostle Paul, hoping that someday he would be able to visit the church at Rome, sat down and dictated this letter to the church at Rome and went into all of these wonderful details about salvation, beginning, as you remember, telling the story of man's sin and his judgment and how sin has affected the lives of people in every generation, and then what God has done for us in Christ in justifying us, and how He is working in our lives to make us like the Lord Jesus. We are predestined not only to be saved, but we are predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son, and that we are all destined for glory, and that nothing can ever separate us from the love of Christ, as he tells us there in the last few verses of Romans 8.

So he had a tremendous grasp of the truth. He was not a babe in Christ. He was not a novice. His heart was full of the truth. So as he mentions his burden here, he says, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." He is making his prayer in line with what he has been teaching regarding the nation Israel.

You can see from Paul's own experience that his knowledge of the doctrine of election, he understood it far more than I understand it, but his knowledge of the doctrine of election did not keep him from praying for the people of Israel; but it burdened him even more to pray for their salvation.

I want you to see the intensity of the burden that he had. This is the reason I say that he had a burden for the people of Israel that you and I have not yet shared, and I do not know that we ever will.

I have been in the ministry a long time and I have never heard anybody, the most mature saints that I have known, say, what Paul said about the salvation of the people of Israel: "Chosen of God, certain to be saved, all Israel shall be saved," and yet he was under such an intense burden that he said this--look at chapter 9:1-3, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

If you have a burden like that for lost people, then you had better come up here this morning and let me sit down and listen to you. Think of it. What he is saying is, "I would be willing to have everything that I have in Christ taken away from me for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, if it could mean their salvation." That meant that the love of Christ would let him go. That would mean that he would be brought back under the power of sin. That would mean that he would fall again under the judgment of God. That means that all the joy that he ever had in the Lord Jesus Christ would be taken away from him. He said, "I could wish that I would lose all of that--I myself would go to hell for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." When you see that, do not let anybody ever tell you that the doctrine of election kills your desire to see people saved or keep you from praying that people will be saved, because the Apostle Paul stands as a great illustration of the fact that knowing this truth he was burdened for their salvation as no man has ever been burdened. You know, in all the reading that I have done, there may have been

people who have been burdened like Paul was, but I have never run across any of them I could wish that I myself were accursed for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

The doctrines of Scripture are never in conflict with each other. All it should take for us to know that we need to witness to people, knowing that God has chosen those who are going to be saved, but for the Lord Jesus to say as He did that all power in heaven and earth is given unto him, therefore we are to go and make disciples of all nations with the power of the Holy Spirit as was promised to the disciples so that they could be witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth. When He was with His disciples on one occasion He said to them, you remember, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38).

We do not know who the elect are. They are not marked, as I have said many times. We do not know who is going to respond to the Gospel. We do not know when God is going to touch the hearts of people, but we are to witness and we are to pray. Knowing these truths which Paul discussed in 9, 10 and 11, is going to give us an even greater burden to see people come to the Saviour.

Now let's look at the text a little bit more in detail in chapter 10. "My heart's desire and prayer for to God for Israel is, that they might be saved."

The Bible does not go into a lot of detail about the experiences of the children of Israel under Rome, but they were in very, very trying circumstances. I would not have been at all surprised if Paul had said, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they would be delivered from Rome." However, to him their greatest need was not to be delivered from Rome because, even if they were delivered from Rome but left in their sins, they would still be under the judgment of God. Their greatest need was to be saved from their sins. So this was his prayer for them. He speaks of it as his heart's desire. This is an expression in the Greek which means that this is the one thing with relation to his people that would give him the greatest pleasure, and that he was expressing the fact here that he longed to see Jews coming to Christ and trusting Him for salvation.

Another thing that makes this very amazing is that though Paul was a Jew, he was not the apostle to the Jews. Remember that his ministry was generally to the Gentiles. Peter was the apostle of the circumcision. Yet, here is a group of people so dear to the heart of Paul that he says that there is not anything that would bring him greater pleasure than to see his own people saved. When he speaks of it as his heart's desire, it just seems that he was very concerned in this section of Romans that people would understand that he was not just trying to impress them, saying things that were not really true, because, you remember in chapter 9:1-2 he said, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." He wanted us to know, wanted the Roman believers to know, that this was a genuine concern that he had. He was not just talking. He was not just trying to impress them, but he was speaking from his heart. He meant every word that he was saying.

But, you know, sometimes we have desires, but we do not pray about our desires. The psalmist said long ago, "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Psalm 37:4). That is, He gives you the desires that He intends to fulfill. Paul not only said that his heart's desire, but he also says, "and my prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved." Sometimes we desire good things, and I am sure all of us have perhaps family members or people we know and love who are not born again and we would love to see them saved, would love to see them rejoicing in the Lord as we do, but do we pray for them? "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved." Paul prayed for them with the kind of fervency that a person would pray if you thought that their salvation depended upon your prayers.

We saw in chapter 9 the intensity of his praying for the people of Israel. He carried this tremendous burden. He was willing to give up everything that he had in Christ if that would mean the salvation of his people Israel. But he went on to speak of the fact, when we have here his heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel, you remember that he said in chapter 9, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." Paul is using some very strong language here. He means that he had pain in his soul. His grief over Israel was unceasing. It was with him all the time. He found no relief from the concern that he had. It was with him day and night. He experienced feelings similar to what Jacob experienced when he lost Joseph. The Scriptures tell us that he refused, Jacob refused to be comforted when his sons brought to him the evidence which made him think that Joseph had been killed by some wild animal. The burden that was upon the heart of the Apostle Paul was a burden that he could not get away from. It was with him constantly. He knew what it meant to be forgiven of his sins. He knew the sanctifying work of the Spirit. He knew all the joy that was to be found in Christ, and he just longed to see others coming to know the Saviour and love the Saviour as he did.

Now. What was the reason for his grief? This is what he explains to us here in chapter 10: "I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge."

I think that the New International Version translates this: "They are zealous for God."

This means that they were concerned about God and they were concerned about their relationship to God. It means that they wanted to please God. They wanted to be accepted by Him, and they were doing a lot of things which they hoped would get them acceptance by God. They observed the Sabbath Days. They tithed. Paul mentions in Galatians the observance of days and months and times and years. They sought to keep the Law. Perhaps, if we had been among these people and seen how devout they were in their desire to please God, we would have wondered a little bit why Paul was as concerned as he was about them. As commendable as zeal is--he says that he wants to bear testimony to the fact that they are zealous for God--but he knew that because it was not according to knowledge, that they could do all that they were doing and still end up in hell. It is not enough for people to go to church. It is not enough for people to be religious. It is not enough for people to be seeking to do things that are pleasing to God when you are talking about salvation, when you are talking about having your sins forgiven, when you are talking about being brought into a right relationship with God. You know, the people perhaps that we should be the most alarmed about are people who are in church today and who give their money and who go to church and seek to do the right thing in the ho[pe that they are going to accumulate

enough merit so that when they stand before God they are going to find acceptance with Him. We ought to be very alarmed about those people. Paul expresses greater alarm about these religious people than anybody else because they were blinded to the fact that none of this was adequate. Most of them probably never heard--I don't know this--but, it seems that they were very inadequate in their understanding of the Scriptures. Isaiah had written over seven or eight-hundred years before these words, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses [all of our good works, all of the things that we do because we are zealous to know God, we are zealous to please God] are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities like the wind, have taken us away" (Isaiah 64:6).

They did not know what Paul was going to write. Paul did not know it at the time, but, you remember, when he wrote to Titus he said that it is "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit: Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:5-7). Now that is the Gospel. That is the way for people to get right with God. That is what people need to understand if they are going to find God and please God and be accepted by God and find out when they die that to be absent from their bodies is to be present with Him. All of the good works that we could possibly do, if we could bring them together all of our lives, it would never be adequate for the forgiveness of a single sin. It might be commendable to be religious, but religion alone is not going to save. It might be commendable to be sincere, and Paul did not seem to be doubting their sincerity at all, but, you know, you can be sincerely wrong. Sincerity and zeal will never save you. We must know the truth. "They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." When you do not have the knowledge of the truth, when you do not have the knowledge of the Word of God, then the only thing that you are left with is going about to establish your own righteousness. And the more you are occupied with that, the more ridiculous the Gospel is going to sound. You know, you probably find more acceptance for the Gospel among people who do not even go to church than you do from people who do go to church who think that because they are in church they are going to win points with God. The more we are involved in establishing our own salvation and our own way of righteousness in the hope that it is going to find acceptance with God, the more our ears and our hearts are closed to the true Gospel of the grace of God. It is commendable to do all of these things, but it is very, very dangerous because we need to know God's way. As Paul says here in the fourth verse of chapter 10, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

Isn't it amazing that people can call themselves Christians and talk about salvation and never mention the Lord Jesus Christ or have any idea that He has anything to do with our salvation at all, when He is the only Saviour. Man stands condemned before God by the Law. Christ has fully satisfied all of its demands, taking our punishment upon Himself, the punishment which we so justly deserve. So it becomes clear that when you understand what your real need is and how deep your need is, how impossible it is for us to erase our sins from the record, then by the grace of God we may have a heart to listen to what the Scriptures have to say about Christ. The Law never saved anybody and the Law never perfected anybody. Paul has made that very, very clear in his writing of the Book of Romans. You remember, that early in the eighth chapter he said this--you can see it in verses 3 and 4, if you want to look back to chapter 8: "For what the law

could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh [not in sinful flesh, but in the likeness of sinful flesh], and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

They have a zeal of God, they are zealous for God, but what they are doing, they are doing in ignorance, "for they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves, unto the righteousness of God." This is what pained Paul in the depths of his soul. This is what gave him a burden that he could never get out from under. This is what made him say, "If the Lord would only open their eyes so that they would see, I would gladly give up all that I have in Christ, in order that they might be saved."

He began this epistle by saying, you remember, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17).

Many of us have heard this message from the time that we could understand anything. I was reminded of that when I married Jason and Andrea. God blessed them richly in putting them in homes where their parents knew the Lord. They had grandparents who knew the Lord. Their parents lived before them as those who know the Saviour and taught them the Gospel. They heard it from the time that they could understand anything at all, and in time got brought each of them to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. That is true of many of our young couples who get married. But there is not that knowledge in everybody. Paul knew that the people of Israel were people who had despised the Lord Jesus Christ, and because of their ignorance of Him, they felt that the weight of their salvation rested upon what they did. They would spend their lives doing those things and yet find themselves eternally separated from God.

What must be the experience of people who have sincerely sought to please God only to find that when they die they have been mistaken all of their lives, because there are many people--good people, sincere people--who today think that their salvation rests upon their works. Then to find out that they have not understood the truth, that they could never do enough, that they were still under the judgment of God, and that their works were actually abominable in God's sight, that they were doomed to hell for all eternity because they never had the knowledge of the truth. You see, this is why Paul was so concerned. Only God could have given him the kind of burden that he had to see his fellow Israelites saved.

When I read something like this, it makes me realize how far I have to go yet in my own relationship with the Lord. How wonderful it would be, if, as we see this this morning, just a portion of his burden could be placed upon us by the Holy Spirit so that day by day in our waking moments and perhaps even when we are asleep this burden would be resting upon us. No matter how a person may be trying to earn his salvation, there is only one way for us to be saved, isn't there? That is through Christ and through His death on the Cross. I trust that it will be our desire, our heart's desire and our prayer to God for Israel and for people everywhere that they might be saved.

Perhaps there are some here today--I do not know all of you--some today, who are zealous for God. Maybe you came this morning because you are concerned about your relationship to God. Dear Junko, who has gone back to Japan, has told many of us that she went to several churches in Japan because she was looking for the truth and was not able to find it, could not hear it. The Lord in His wonderful grace brought her over to the states to do teaching, and it was here He put her in contact with people who could tell her how to be saved.

Perhaps there is somebody here like that this morning. You have come because you are trying to please God, you have been doing a lot of other things, but you find as you hear what we have seen in Scripture this morning that you are wasting your time and you are headed in the wrong direction. You are not better off in your relationship with Him than you were when you first got concerned. The fact that you are concerned may be a good sign that God is dealing with you. I trust that the Lord will use His Word this morning, if this is your condition, to open your heart to the Gospel and to see that it is not by your works, not by your good deeds, not by your sincerity, not by your religion, not by anything that you do, "not by works of righteousness which we have done," but you need to cast yourself upon the mercy of God and in faith look to the Lord Jesus Christ as the One Who came into the world to provide salvation for sinners. The promise is, and it still stands... I like that way Paul talked about election, "that the purpose of God according to election might stand." The promises of God stand. The truth of God stands. It never needs to be altered. The Bible might be outdated as far as the language is concerned, but never as far as the truth is concerned. The truth always remains the same. What Peter said to the people in Jerusalem when they gathered there for their religious observance of the Passover and the Feast of Pentecost, not knowing what the truth was, he said, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4;12). If Christ is not our Saviour, we are not saved; and we never will be saved until Christ is our Saviour.

May the Lord enable you by His grace, if you do not know Him, to trust Him this morning as your own personal Saviour from sin.

Shall we pray.

Father,

These have been very weighty, heavy words we have been considering this morning. Lord, we stand in amazement as we think of the Apostle Paul and the burden that he had knowing the Lord Jesus, loving Him as he did, understanding the truth the way he did, and yet so burdened for people without Christ that he was willing to give it all up if only they could be saved. Father, surely we need the kind of burden upon our hearts that will keep us praying for those who are without Christ and keep us speaking to those who are without the Saviour, if possibly as they hear the Word and hear the truth and learn about the Lord Jesus Christ, you will open their hearts and they will trust Him and find in Him the salvation that they could never, never provide for themselves. Should there be even one person here this morning who does not know the Saviour, help them to understand the truth and grant them faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in His dear Name, Amen.