

Who Will Be Saved?

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Text: Romans 10:1-5

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OPENING PRAYER:

Our heavenly Father, we praise you for the illuminating power of your Holy Spirit. For the way in which Jesus Christ makes the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, and the dead to rise, and the blind to see. And we pray that all of these things may be true for us spiritually tonight. That we may hear your voice in your word. That we may find desires arising within us, to sing your praises and to speak to others about our Lord Jesus. That some of us may be raised from spiritual death into spiritual life. And that all of us may have a sense, that through faith, we have a vision of your greatness and glory, and especially tonight, of your overwhelming grace in Jesus Christ. So take us, Father by the hand, for we are those who see poorly. Speak to us powerfully, because our hearing is so diminished and open our eyes, that we may see, not merely shadows, but the reality of your power and truth in Jesus Christ. So, Father, speak to us now. In Jesus precious name we pray, Amen. Please be seated.

SCRIPTURE READING:

Now we read together as we continue to study in Paul's letter to the Romans. Tonight, we read in Romans chapter 10. And from the beginning of the chapter, Romans chapter 10. And you'll find the passage in the pew Bible on page 946. And will be helpful to you and to me also, actually, if you have your Bible open at that place as we study this part of God's word. Though the bulletin says, we're going to read verses one through 13, we are actually going to read only verses one through four.

"Brothers", says Paul, "my heart's desire and prayer to God for them", that is Israel his kinsmen according to the flesh, "my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own,

they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

SERMON:

Back in the 17th century, I believe, in the colonies in the northeast of America, if a man wanted to be ordained as a Congregationalist minister, he had to give an affirmative answer to this ordination question: Are you prepared to be damned for the glory of God? Are you prepared to be damned for the glory of God? It was, in fact, in my view, a mistaken question. But it was a question that had arisen because of a certain understanding of what the Apostle Paul says at the beginning of Romans chapter nine. When he expresses in verse two his great sorrow and "unceasing anguish in his heart", so much so that he could wish himself accursed -- that is damned for the sake of the salvation of his kinsmen according to the flesh.

But while it might have been misleading and mistaken, to ask young men candidates for the gospel ministry, if they were prepared to be damned for the glory of God, it did underline what was the expectation of anyone who believed the gospel. That they would be willing to do absolutely anything in order to see others brought to faith in Jesus Christ. And so, in Presbyterian churches still part of the ordination and installation vow is the question, "Are not zeal for the glory of God, and a desire for the salvation of man, your chief inducements in entering this holy ministry?" And we have seen right through Romans chapter nine, and now into the beginning of Romans chapter 10, that the apostle Paul is profoundly burdened about the spread and reception of the gospel. And although in answer to certain persons who raise difficulties about his teaching, and are resistant to his emphasis on the glorious purposes of God, the apostle Paul leads us into some fairly difficult and dark waters for us to follow Him. We mustn't lose sight of the fact that these chapters are about evangelistic passion. And that's so significant for us to understand precisely because the Apostle Paul here is taken up with the sovereignty of God. These are among the supreme sections of the New Testament that underline for us, and this is true in the history of the church, that the most passionate evangelists have been those who have been thoroughly convinced of the absoluteness of the sovereignty of God in salvation. And the Apostle Paul is chief among them.

You remember as he answers what to him is a major challenge to the gospel, he preaches, his concern is to vindicate his gospel in order that he may go to Rome with that gospel. And the problem, actually, the problem is that most Christians don't see that there even is a problem. And that is a problem. The problem is, and you would see this if you read the Old Testament carefully, that God's promise to his chosen people, Israel, did not seem to be coming to fruition. And everywhere the Apostle Paul went, what he discovered was, the Jews rejected Christ and the Gentiles received Christ.

I said last Lord's day evening, that if you read quickly through Acts chapter 13, through to Acts, chapter 19 you would see this. That probably was a counsel of perfection. But I think it's important that we see this. That this was actually not just a theological theoretical problem for the Apostle Paul. But this was a problem that was embedded deeply into his own experience. Right from the beginning of his first missionary journey. For example, in Acts chapter 13, when they arrive and Antioch of Pisidia. He goes to the synagogue Acts chapter 13, and verse 15. And he is encouraged to bring a message to the synagogue congregation. And what he does is to expound the Old Testament scriptures to them until

the Old Testament Scriptures point to Jesus Christ, and He demonstrates that Jesus Christ is the one who was prophesied. But what we discover was, the response is that this synagogue rejected him. And there was great jealousy among the Jews. And they began to contradict what was spoken by Paul and to revile him. And so, eventually, Paul shakes the dust off his feet and moves on.

And he and Barnabas move on to Iconium and they speak the word of God there. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. And so he moves on to Lystra. And in Lystra he finds himself stoned because, Acts chapter 14 Verse 19, Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city supposing him to be dead. And so He returns eventually to his home church and gives them this report. The Gentiles are flocking into the kingdom of God and everywhere we go, only a minority of Jewish men and women are coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

And so in Acts chapter 17, he sets off on his further missionary journey. And as he moves into this second missionary journey, he finds himself in the same situation. He comes to Thessalonica in Acts chapter 17. And what happens there? Some of them in the synagogue are persuaded, and others, a great many who are Gentiles believed, but the Jews were jealous. And taking some wicked men of the rabble they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. And so Paul moves on to Berea, and the Berean people are more sensitive to the message. But then we are told as many of them are "beginning to believe, and not a few Gentile women of high standing", that Jews come from Thessalonica. Because they've learned that the gospel is flourishing in Berea and they agitate and stir up the crowds.

And so it goes on everywhere the Apostle Paul goes. He comes to Corinth, and exactly the same thing happens in Corinth as he preaches the word of God. They opposed him and they reviled him. So much so that this problem for Paul, that his own kinsmen, were rejecting the gospel was actually a problem that found its sacrament in his own body. The marks of the stoning. The marks of the lashes -- 39 lashes that he had received several times at the hand of the Jews -- were right there in his body. Every time he took off his outer garment, he was reminded that his own people had rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so he asked the question, has the word of God failed? And his answer is no, God is working his sovereign purposes out. And the truth of the matter is, as we saw last time, that Israel has turned away from its promised Messiah, and all the responsibility for their rejection of the gospel lies with them. And it's when we feel that -- feel something of the weight of the Old Testament promise that God would save His people Israel. And then this rejection of Christ by Israel, Paul's explanation of why they have rejected Christ and why there are these sacraments in his own body, that they have rejected those who belong to Jesus Christ, who preached Jesus Christ to them.

Paul begins this chapter, I think, in the most extraordinary and amazing way. This to me is quite amazing. Quite without parallel for a man who has been so bruised and so beaten by his own people. He begins by expressing to his Roman Christian friends his ongoing burden for Israel. "Brothers", he says, that actually, I've said this before, sometimes you meet Christians who punctuate every paragraph with the explanation brother and think they are being New Testamental when they do so. The apostle Paul relatively rarely has this ejaculation "brothers" and it's always at a point of high emotion for him. Oh, "brothers", he is saying, "my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved."

And it's interesting, isn't it? It's, it's something for us, as it were to have stumbled into Romans chapter nine and Paul say I would do anything for the salvation of my kinsmen. But when we get to the beginning of chapter 10, and we understand what he's really talking about here, and he bears in his body, "the marks of the Lord Jesus", as he says to the Galatians. We understand this is not a normal kind of passion. This is a supernatural kind of passion. This is a Christ-like kind of passion. Who having been beaten black and blue and hanging up on a cross, says himself to his father, "Oh Father, forgive them because they are so ignorant of what it is that they are really doing." This as a Steven-like, passion for the salvation of others. "Oh Lord Jesus, Son of man, standing at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on them, and forgive them." It's the only thing that can explain this kind of thing -- is supernatural, divine, transforming grace. That he cares so passionately about the very people who have maligned him. Who have rejected Him. Who have persecuted him. Who have hurt him. And he keeps on loving them. He keeps on loving them.

And that's what makes these chapters so awesome. As this man who has worked his way through how it is that God is working his purposes out. Looks over his kinsmen as Jesus looked over Jerusalem, and inwardly, and yes outwardly, he weeps with compassion for them. And that's what always happens when the Gospel comes home. The man or woman or boy or girl, to whom the gospel has come home, who understands what an amazing grace Jesus Christ has shown to me in my spiritual death and blindness and deafness and lameness. And he has come to this earth and given his life. And in his dying breath, has prayed that through what he is doing, sinners like me should be forgiven. That's the only thing in all the world that creates this kind of thing. And the tragedy is and -- and it's brought out without Paul even mentioning it to us -- the tragedy is that it's possible for us, as Christian people to read this kind of thing and say to ourselves, what is the man is so excited about? Why is it that the man says, Lord, I'm willing to be lost myself if that were a possible thing? I could wish, Lord anything, anything to save these men and women. I don't need to say to you how different is the modern gospel that offers health, wealth and happiness. And makes those who preach it rich, by comparison with this gospel evangelist who is the real thing? Because he has an ongoing burden for the salvation of those who are his kinsmen according to the flesh? And it behooves us to share it.

Do you share it? Do you know anything about this? Are you really a Christian? Do you believe anything that the gospel says? Have you no concern for those who are lost? Oh, my dear friends, that can only be because I have little sense that apart from Jesus Christ, I myself am utterly lost.

And we look at this burden that he bears: "My heart's desire, prayer to God for them is that they may be saved." Is there anybody you care about enough that your heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they might be saved. Is there anybody you care that much for? Do we care more about our clothes and our dogs and our cats and our cars and our houses than we care about the eternal salvation of men and women? Is that what we really are in the 21st century church, that this seems such a strange thing to us? Oh may God baptize us with something of this spirit that our hearts desire and prayer to God for others might be that they would be saved!

And then you see, he begins an explanation. It's a heartbreaking analysis. So he begins by sharing his tremendous burden. And then he explains to us why he has this burden. And I say it is a heartbreaking analysis. He says, "I bear them witness", I'll say this about them he says, "they have a zeal for God, but it's not according to knowledge." So you see what he's saying. He's not saying lack of zeal that's the problem. They have zeal. But it's zeal without knowledge. Now zeal can be an admirable thing. But zeal

without knowledge? Zeal without knowledge damns men and women. And we recognize that it's, it's easy for it to be true.

Do you know sometimes I think the great shock that took place in most of our minds in 911 was not the horrific loss of life. It was horrific. But just think what happened a couple of weeks ago in Haiti, by comparison, that didn't affect us nearly in the same way. What I think shocked us to the core was that anybody would believe anything enough to kill themselves for it. To die for it.

And Paul is saying that it's that kind of zeal. And these Jews had that kind of zeal. But it was mistaken. Do you see what he's saying? He's saying it's possible to go to hell because you're wrong. Religiously wrong! He wouldn't be saying to God, oh, God, if it were possible, I would say curse me rather than curse them. If he didn't really believe that that was their condition. Because they had zeal that wasn't according to knowledge. We know about it in all kinds of trivial ways from from Neil's childhood zeal for a birthday party -- one of my early school memories, and that just came back to me thinking about this passage. Another trivial illustration of it, but it certainly illustrates the point, was when our teacher when we were seven, wrote on the board how to spell the word height. As in how tall you are. What height are you and she wrote on the board, h-e-i-g-h-t. And I who never spoken class, put my little arrogant hand up and said that's not how you spell height, Mrs. Whatever her name was. It's h-i-g-h-t. You don't spell high, h-e-i-g-h. And so you don't spell height? H-e-i-g-h-t? It's h-i-g-h-t. Now grant me that I was a completely logical child. But I was altogether mistaken. And I couldn't have had more zeal for spelling if I'd been in the final of a spelling bee -- a universal spelling bee. I was absolutely sure, dead sure, I was right. And yet I was absolutely wrong -- utterly mistaken, and wrong. And this was their situation.

And because that was their situation, because they didn't understand what true gospel knowledge is, they made another mistake. Paul describes it like this. He says, "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge, and therefore being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, they sought to establish their own righteousness." Do you know that's been, by and large the story of multitudes of protestant churches throughout the last century? You ask so many members of so many churches, how is it that you are acceptable to God? And the answer is, because of what I have accomplished in my little modest way. I say it -- I am better than most. And I assume I will be accepted by God. And this was their situation. They sought to establish their own righteousness. And of course, Paul had a special burden about this. Now, we understand that, of course, Paul would have a special burden about this, because he saw himself in his kinsmen according to the flesh. He had done exactly this. This is what he speaks about, isn't it, in Philippians chapter three. When he says, you know, there was a time when I was just like this. And if anybody had said to me, well, how are you doing? He would have said, as far as righteousness, according to the law is concerned, I am flawless. Yes, I'm not perfect, but but God will not find any real flaw in me. And then as he began to realize what a flimsy garment that was, as God penetrated his blindness, particularly as I've suggested earlier in these studies, through what he saw in Steven, that he knew nothing he could accomplish could ever produce in him, that grace and Christlikeness that he had seen in Steven. And then he says, what a fool I was to pursue my own righteousness. But now he says, I longed to have the righteousness that comes from God in Jesus Christ, not to be found in my own righteousness.

You see the mistake, that someone can make us that they begin to see that their-- their present condition isn't really acceptable to God. Many of us do this when God begins to work in our lives. We see that we're, we're not really fit for God's presence. And so we determine -- we become fitter for God's presence. And we pursue this with greater zeal and with greater ignorance. Paul had discovered

that all that righteousness was flimsy in the sight of God, and that he needed another's righteousness -- a perfect righteousness -- a righteousness, that would enable him to stand in the presence of God. The way the Lord Jesus stands in the presence of God. And the only place he could find that righteousness was by going to Jesus and confessing that he was a sinner and finding in Jesus Christ a covering that would bear the scrutiny of Almighty God. But instead of doing that, says Paul, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who have a zeal that is without knowledge, and seek to establish their own righteousness -- now, here's the litmus test... Notice the strangeness of the verb that Paul uses. He doesn't say they didn't seek the righteousness that comes from God. He says they wouldn't submit to it. And you see, there's the rub, isn't it? The message of the righteousness of God comes in Jesus Christ, the message that deconstructs me in my self sufficiency, and says, I have nothing that I can offer to him. What happens in my heart when I hear that message is it this? That strangely, what builds up resistance in my heart against the righteousness of God is the message that this righteousness can come only through God's grace? That's a great mystery, isn't it? That it's actually the message of free saving grace in Jesus Christ that hardens many hearts.

I think perhaps the Lord Jesus even gave a little hint of this in his parable of the sower. You remember, the sower just throws his seed around into different soils and the soil that's hardest, is actually the pathway. And the reason the pathway is hard, is because the sower walks most frequently on the pathway. That's why it sometimes can feel a very terrible thing to be a preacher of the gospel. Because you know that the gospel itself evokes a hardness. There is a, there is a pushing out, and a pushing back. I suppose, like most ministers, I have sometimes preached the gospel in situations where I've wondered if the words were going to come right back out of my mouth and down my throat. I have so felt that inner resistance to speaking about my glorious Lord Jesus Christ. And that's how it is. That's what Paul experienced. They wouldn't submit. Why wouldn't they submit? Because to do so would mean that absolutely everything they had built up, would collapse. And they would have absolutely nothing. But you see that's how we come, isn't it? "Nothing, in my hand, I bring simply to thy cross I cling. Naked look to thee for dress. Helpless, look to thee for Grace. Foul, I to the fountain fly." -- That's the way you come. But the last thing sinners are prepared to yield is this principle about which Paul is speaking.

But we are utterly helpless and hopeless, in this whole matter of salvation. And as Archbishop Temple of the Church of England in the early part of the 20th century, so well put it, "the only thing you and I contribute to our salvation is the sin that makes it necessary"!

I wonder how that strikes you tonight. So Paul has a great burden, and he gives us this heartbreaking analysis. And then marvelously, he says this in verse four, let me simply repeat the gospel message: "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes".

Now, you might not think this, and perhaps don't know this, but this is generally regarded as one of the most difficult texts in the whole of Romans. For the very simple reason that a question arises here. What does Paul mean when he says that Christ is the END of the law for righteousness? Actually -- That's a question in English. Never mind in Greek, isn't it? Because even in English, yes, not just even in English -- actually, in English. Let's not be modest about the fact that we speak English here. The word "end" in English can mean the finish. Like in the old movies, The End. "That was the sign that you cleared up your popcorn and you left the movie theater. End. Finish. Or the end, the end - the goal to which I'm striving. The end, I have in view. And actually, in many ways, it's possible that Paul here could mean either of those two things. That the thing that his kinsmen had missed was that that Jesus

was actually where the law had been pointing all the time. And so they spent their lives looking at the law instead of seeing where the law pointed.

I think myself, it's slightly more likely, indeed more likely, that what Paul is saying here is that for those who come to faith in Jesus Christ, there is a realization that that's the end of them thinking about the law... about what we do, as the way to righteousness. And I say that because looking over the places where Paul uses the word that he has here that's translated "end" it seems to me that typically, when Paul uses this word, he refers to the end in the sense of the finish. The thing is done. And only occasionally, does he use it as the goal, the thing, for which we are aiming. And so if that's the case, what Paul is saying is quite simply this, that when you come to faith in Jesus Christ as He had come to faith in Jesus Christ, you realize that that's the end of seeking to gain righteousness before God by your little efforts to do things, rather than your empty hand to receive Jesus Christ.

That's probably the greatest relief in all the world. And for Paul, the tragedy is that offering this gospel as he was doing, from synagogue to synagogue, he was offering this gospel, and yet there was this vigorous response, no, we will establish our own way, by our own ability to keep the law. Not seeing that the law was never given as a means to attain brownie points with God. But a means to point us to our need of salvation from God, and then to give us wisdom as to how to live for God. But when you come to Christ, you realize that that is the end of the law, as the way to righteousness -- to acceptance before God.

Or perhaps it would be fairer, to experience -- to say, we come to understand that, but we often lapse into the old way. That's what legalism really is. And there's plenty of it in the Christian life, and in the Christian church. Allowing, establishing our own patterns of life, to smother the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And it's a principle, actually, that lingers, at least in my experience in most Christian's hearts. Because we're all by nature legalist. And it can linger long after we have become Christians. But after we become Christians, it lingers in many different guises. And they're usually very subtle. But it's always an enemy of grace. And it always produces a kind of restricted growth in the life of the Christian. And at times it's almost atmospheric in the sense of somebody's life.

Let me give you some of the ways in which it appears. It appears, for example, in personal relationships when another Christian is present, and our first thoughts or words about them are negative. You ever find that in your own life, your first thought about somebody who is a genuine Christian is negative because of something in their life. Instead of being soaked in grace and thinking of them as someone for whom Christ has died, we think of them as though Christ had never died for them. And so we see them largely and performance terms rather than in terms of how gracious the Lord Jesus Christ has been to them. You know, another way in which emerges in some of us is because we are always putting other people right. That's an amazing illustration of a legal spirit. Because we just can't let other people sin. Even though we allow ourselves to sin plenty. That was the problem with the Pharisees, wasn't it? Jesus excoriated the Pharisees for that very thing. And then it invades my relationship with God. And I began to think that my relationship with God is ultimately based on my performance and not on his grace. And it invades the church. And we'll see this later on, and Paul's letter to the Romans, when there are people in the church who have different practices from us. And before we are willing to receive them, we've got to put them right -- you see. And instead of receiving them for Jesus sake, we want to put them right first, and then we'll receive them for Jesus sake.

And it appears in our relationships with our children. You know one of the things that appeared in the pop psychology, I think of the, of the 60s or 70s, that actually has become invasive of the way in which many Christian parents now bring up their children... They bring up their children on this principle, that if they do something wrong, you deal with it. If they do something, right, you praise them. And they mistakenly think that's the gospel way. But do you see that's entirely a performance way? It's got nothing to do with the gospel way. That's entirely a law way. If you do it right. I praise you. If you do it wrong, I chastise you. That's treating our children as though they were Pavlovian dogs. Do you remember his experiment with the dogs? Do you know what I think is the litmus test here. It's this. If your son or daughter has wandered from home, and wasted some of your hard earned riches and lived a foul life. And they come slowly up the garden path, and you open the door to them. Is your first instinct going to be to open your arms and wrap your arms around them and smother anything they say, smother anything they say -- do you remember what the prodigal son was saying? He was saying to himself, maybe I can work my way back into my father's favor. And he was rehearsing his speech, "Father, now I've sinned against heaven. And in your sight, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son, make me one of your hired servants, and our slave my way upwards. And perhaps eventually, you will be able to forget some of the things I've done". And he opens his mouth and he says, father, "I've sinned against heaven, and in your sight." And his father squeezes the breath out of him. And he's never able to say, "I'm not worthy to be called your son, make me one of your hired servants". And the same in our relationship with one another. Yes, yes, yes. Yes. Our Lord Jesus may say to the woman who has taken in adultery, my dear, do not sin any more. But first of all, he says, "I do not condemn you. Your sins are forgiven." That's how grace works. That's why it works in such a different way from the way my heart naturally works.

And this is Paul's burden that Christ "ends" the law-way, as a way of righteousness. Yes, he does say, dear one If you love me keep my commandments. But not as the way to be loved first. But as the way of being loved first.

Well are you grace oriented? That's the message. Can you taste it? And do people taste it from you? You know people have a taste. You know, if you've any kind of maturity and been around Christians and have a sensitivity, I sometimes shudder to think what my preaching tastes like to people. Because sometimes I feel so unclean. I wonder what my life tastes like to people. You know, you've got a taste. The Japanese tell us that we have a smell. That we all smell like milk. Why do we all smell like milk? Because we drink milk. And that's how you begin to taste of grace. Because you've drunk grace. Grace, Grace, Grace. You know what it's like to get into an elevator and somebody opens their mouth. And you immediately think that persons been sitting in their hotel room or in their office smoking like a chimney. And there's no way that they can avoid the atmosphere of what they've been breathing in, being breathed out. And it's the same with us as Christians we breathe in and out either grace or law, grace or law, grace or law. I mean, in the sense of legalism. And it just exudes from us. Because it affects our relationships. It affects our worship. It affects our fellowship. We need to take in great gulps of grace if we're going to be able to give out grace. We need to have those legal spirits, those legalistic spirits drowned and silenced in grace. "Grace, that is greater than all my sin." And yes, that is greater than all the sin of all the Christians I know. So that we embrace one another as those who have been "en-graced" and embraced by our Lord Jesus Christ. So it's Grace, Grace, Grace, Grace, Grace, Grace, Grace, Grace.

And when we've drunk it in -- when we're inebriated with grace, we will also have so tasted the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we will see why Paul cared for those who had never, ever tasted it. "Just

as I am, without one plea, but that your blood was shed for me, and that you bid me come to thee. O Lamb of God. I come.

Have you ever tasted grace? Really tasted grace? You'll never forget it.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, what a word that says to us. Give us a burden for those who are lost and at the same time to overwhelm us with a sense of your marvelous love for us in Jesus Christ. Oh work both into our hearts, we pray, that we may be set free from all that binds us and condemns us and may belong more fully to our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask it in his name. Amen