



THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Light of the Valley Lutheran Church

What I Wouldn't Give...

Romans 9:1-5 (NIV84)

¹ I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—² I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. ⁵ Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

We have had an amazing journey through the second half of Romans chapter 8 over the last three weeks. In the first week, we heard that even while creation groans, while we groan as our bodies ache and start failing because of the effects of sin, as we get to the point where we don't know how or what to pray, God made sure to tell us that whenever we pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, perfecting our prayer and making it in line with God's will so that it is always answered. The second week we focused on one of the greatest promises in all the Bible, Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." God obligates himself to work all things that happen in our lives – whether they are good or bad – to be for our ultimate good, to bring us closer to him and to the salvation he gives us. God followed that promise up with our focus last week on the very fact that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Not death, not life, not angels nor demons, not the powers of this world, neither the present nor the future, neither height nor depth, nothing in all of creation can separate us from God's love. Your salvation in Christ Jesus is absolutely, 100% sound and secure. These truths are the greatest things anyone can ever hear, and it is our special joy and privilege to bask in these words.

Today in Romans chapter 9 we reach a massive tonal shift that seems to go against the great confidence that God's Word instilled in us by the previous promises and truths. This is why Paul starts his new topic by writing, "I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit." (verse 1) Paul says in three different ways that he is speaking the truth from God. He needed to set this down first for what he was going to write next.

"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart." (verse 2) Why, Paul? Because, as he would write in the verse immediately following our section, "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." (verse 6) To say it another way, not all the descendants of God's chosen people, the Israelites, are believers in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. Not all the Israelites are going to heaven. Paul's grief is compounded on this issue because, out of all the people in the world, the Israelites should have the highest percentage of believers. They should have the most believers when you take a look at their past and see how God interacted with them along the way. Paul lists just some of their spiritual advantages here.

"Theirs is the divine glory." (verse 4) They had seen God's presence as the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night which led them through the wilderness after they left of slavery of Egypt. They had seen the glory of the Lord envelope their worship space, again looking like a cloud. They had seen Moses' face radiant, too bright to look at, after he spent time talking with God on Mount Sinai.

"Theirs is...the covenants." (verse 4) God had made sacred agreements with the Israelites. Worship me, follow me, and things will go well for you. You will prosper in this land. I will never take this from you. But disobey me, reject me, and I will tear this land away from you and I will curse you, not bless you.

"Theirs is...the receiving of the law." (verse 4) Out of all the nations in the world and all the people and all the civilizations, God chose the descendants of Israel to be the ones who would receive the written Word of God. This wasn't just the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments – that picture we have in our heads of Charlton Heston coming down from Mount Sinai – but the written history of God's people along with their various commandments. God chose the Israelites to be a beacon that others would come to them as they sought out the true God. He didn't choose the great countries and nations like the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, or the Romans, but rather puny Israel.

"Theirs is...the temple worship." (verse 4) God told the Israelites specifically how to worship him and where to worship him. Everything was laid out for them down to the "t." All of their worship – the sacrifices, the blood, the cleanliness – pointed to the promises God had given them, promises made regarding their Messiah, their deliverer, the one who was appointed to save them.

"Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!" (verse 5) Jesus himself came from the Israelites. He is one of them, one of their brothers. The Israelites had hoped for centuries, for millennia, for the promised coming of Jesus to happen, and when it did, they rejected him, despised him, mocked him, conspired against him, and finally nailed him to a cross.

The Israelites had every spiritual advantage, and yet so many threw it all away. How many people do we know who have done the same thing? Who do we know who have had every spiritual advantage to believe in Jesus as their Savior, yet they tossed it aside? How many of you have raised up children to know and love their Savior only to have them stop going to church the second they stop living under your roof, that they go off to college and then tell you that they no longer buy into this God stuff – the Bible, the one way to heaven, all of that? How many friends have you known who have heard the same Bible stories that you did, but yet they are okay leaving the church, it's not a priority for them, they don't want to hear about it anymore?

We agonize over those who know what the Word of God actually says but reject it. In this way, we know Paul's pain as he wrote, "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race." (verse 3) Maybe we would say it this way: What I wouldn't give so that they would stay believers. What I wouldn't give that they would want to come back to church with me. What I wouldn't give that they would walk and talk in the same Christian faith with me.

Paul was willing to give up his eternity in heaven if that would mean his brothers, the Israelites, would go to heaven. He was willing to be cursed, cut off from Christ and his forgiveness, condemned to hell for all eternity and suffer indescribable pain if that meant his kin would go to heaven. What I wouldn't give so that they could remain believers in Christ, that they wouldn't reject him.

What would you give? What would you give so that someone would stay connected to God and his love, to the forgiveness and salvation that come only through Christ Jesus? Would you give up some canned goods from your pantry? Would you give a \$100? Would you give the clothes off your back? Would you give up your TV? Your car? Your paycheck? Would you give up your savings? Your retirement? Your pension? How about your house? Would you offer your firstborn so that someone would turn from being an unbeliever to a believer?

Even if you and I were willing to give up all these things, it still wouldn't be enough. Even if we were to give ourselves, like Paul suggested, to be cursed and cut off from Christ – to be condemned to hell – we would not be giving enough. "No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him – the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough – that he should live on forever and not see decay." (Psalm 49:7-8) We can never give enough of a payment because we cannot offer enough to buy someone's way to heaven.

We can't give enough, but there is one who could make that payment, and one who did make that payment. That was the one who traced his human ancestry through the patriarchs of Israel - the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He gave himself, his life, everything he was, so that we would be spared from being cursed and cut off from God. He was enough because he was not just a man; he was and is God over all.

As a man, Jesus Christ lived under God's law, obeying it for us. As God, he was able to live under that law perfectly. As a man, he suffered and died, gave his life. He shed his blood to pay God for the life of another. As God, he was able to make his blood payment - that sacrifice of his perfect life - be a payment that would cover all sins of all people of all time, including you and me. As true God and true Man, Jesus Christ gave us his all to save us from being cursed and cut off from God. He allowed himself to experience that so we never would.

Knowing what God gave for us, let's ask our question again, what wouldn't you give so that someone could have this incredible free gift of God's full and complete payment for our sins? Would you give your time? Time in worship and Bible class to be filled up with his amazing grace? Time in reading the Scriptures at home, reading the children's Bible with your kids, telling them the importance of the cross? Would give your time and energy to share this message with your immediate family? With your coworkers, neighbors, friends? Would you give support to your pastor to do these things? Would you give him support with your prayers. Would you give your offerings to support the work of your church? Would you give of yourself to the people sitting around you today, that no matter how you feel about them, whether you know them or not, whether you get along with them or not, will you build them up, will you give them support, will you forgive and love them as Christ loved you and gave up everything for you?

We know where Paul is coming from as it pains him to acknowledge that so many of his own people have rejected Jesus. He would give up his eternity in heaven if it meant that they would all go in his place. He can't give that and neither can we, but Jesus Christ has given himself to be cursed and cut off from God in our place.

What wouldn't God give for you to be saved? He spared no expense. He gave us his all. So, what wouldn't you give so that people know this message, so that people would be encouraged and strengthened to remain connected to Christ? As you ponder that, dear Christians, remember that Christ has given you and me everything. Amen.

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Pastor Jon Klein
pastorklein@gmail.com