

Paul: A Disciple Who Prayed for the Salvation of Others

Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer

Autumn Ridge Church, Rochester, MN

March 6 & 7, 2010

No. 4: Dynamic Discipleship
Scripture: Romans 10:1-15

At the conclusion of this service we will pin our **Sharing Hope Prayer Cards** on these walls at the front of the sanctuary.

If you didn't get a card last weekend or you left it at home you will find one in your Ridgelines. There is still plenty of time to write out your prayer for how we can share hope with our community and our world.

However, before we present our petitions to God I want us to look at Paul's prayer for sharing hope because it serves as a tremendous encouragement for us to pray boldly.

This prayer is a spectacular example of the power of God.

There was a time when the last thing that Paul wanted was to share the hope of Christ. He spent the first part of his life doing all he could to prevent that.

But as we saw last weekend Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus and that changed everything.

Ananias came and shared hope with him and now Paul is sharing hope with others.

We are in the middle of a series on dynamic discipleship.

Here we see that disciples of Jesus find their relationship with Christ to be so meaningful they want others to enjoy it too.

So please turn to Romans chapter 10 in your Bible and take out your message outline as we look at **Paul: A Disciple Who Prayed For the Salvation of Others.**

First we notice **THE PRAYER FOR SALVATION**

If Paul were filling out one of these prayer cards he would write, **"My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved." (v 1)**

The men's small group I am part of are studying Romans.

Two weeks ago we looked at this chapter.

We were struck with the passion in Paul's words.

You can almost hear the break in his voice and see the tears in his eyes.

This prayer reflects Paul's heart's desire.

Paul is known as the Apostle to the Gentiles but he, himself is a Jew and he has this great ambition to see his people saved.

In the previous chapter Paul grieves over Israel's unbelief and says, **"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart." (Romans 9:2)**

He is even willing to lose his own salvation if that would mean that his people could gain it. Listen to him cry to God:

“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, the people of Israel.” (Romans 9:3-4)

His peoples’ lost condition breaks his heart so Paul does what we should do when something is troubling us greatly.

He prays that God will act.

There are three helpful aspects about this prayer that are worth noting.

First, **it is made to God.**

We might think “that’s obvious. Aren’t all prayers made to God?” But the point is that God is the one who saves people.

Paul was one of the greatest evangelists in the history of the church but he knows he can’t save a single person.

That task belongs to God.

That has been Paul’s point throughout the letter.

In the first chapter he calls the gospel, **“The power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed.” (1:16-17)**

It is thrilling to watch how Paul develops this idea that all good things come from God.

Grace and peace come from God. Hope comes from God.

The Holy Spirit comes from God and certainly salvation comes from God.

If we are concerned about our own salvation we need to go to God. If we long for a son or daughter to be saved we need to bring their name to God.

That is why we are presenting these prayer cards today because every significant thing we do needs to be brought before God.

Second we see that this prayer **is necessary because of ignorance.**

Paul writes, **“For I can testify about them (that is the Jews) that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own.” (v 2-3)**

Paul’s fellow Jews truly wanted to please God but they didn’t know how. They were ignorant of the gospel and so they developed their own system of salvation which consisted of good works. They excelled in this. They kept the law and they were moral but Paul’s heart is breaking because he knows that will not save them. They cannot be good enough.

In chapter 3 he writes **“No one will be declared righteous . . . by observing the law.” (Romans 3:20)**

Sincerely is not enough, for we can be sincerely wrong.

Salvation must be based on truth.

Ignorance is still prevalent today.

Most people in America believe in heaven and they think you get there by living a good life. The Bible tells us that is impossible. But those dear people have never read the Bible and they keep walking on a path that leads to hopelessness.

That is why the job of the church is to explain the gospel. It is why a lot of the space in The Center is dedicated to classrooms where children and teens and adults will be taught from the Bible how we can be saved.

Third, this prayer **is fulfilled in Christ.**

Paul writes, **"Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."** (v 4)

Christ was born to save his people from their sin.

Christ lived to teach us the way of salvation.

Christ died to atone for our sins.

Christ rose to give us eternal life.

And Christ is coming again that we might live with him.

All that is packed in to this profound prayer, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved." May God give us this passion to say that our heart's desire is for Rochester to be saved.

Our heart's desire is for Guinea to be saved.

Perhaps we come from a particular culture and so we naturally long for our own people to receive God's best gift.

So our prayer becomes, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Chinese that they may be saved or the Mexicans or the Somolians."

Next Paul addresses **THE WAY OF SALVATION**

Paul is not content with just praying for salvation.

He wants to explain the way of salvation to his readers in Rome who are both Jews and Gentiles.

So he provides four descriptions of how we are saved.

He is not giving us a checklist that we need to work our way through. It is more a matter of explaining a single truth in four different ways.

Salvation comes through **faith.**

"The righteousness that is by faith." (v 6)

Righteousness is gained by faith in Christ.

This was Paul's great discovery after a lifetime of trying to keep the law. He shares his breakthrough in the first chapter when he writes, **"The righteous will live by faith."** (1:17)

The point is we don't just begin the Christian life by faith.

We continue the Christian life by faith.

For Paul there are few things more important than faith.

It is at the center of his message as he explains when he says, **"The word of faith we are proclaiming."** (v 8)

Then the way of salvation is found in **confession**.

"If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord. . . you will be saved." (v 9)

Jesus is Lord was the first creed of the church.

To affirm Jesus is Lord means that Jesus is in charge.

Jesus rules our life.

We make that confession when we are baptized.

The pastor asks, "Do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" We respond, "Yes, I do."

Perhaps you wonder if you are a Christian today.

Can you truly say "Jesus is my Lord?"

If you can, you belong to him.

But we also make the confession "Jesus is Lord" by the choices we make each day and in the conversations we have.

I serve on a Board with a fellow who has become a friend.

He freely tells us at Board meetings, "I am a Hindu."

I admire his courage.

In a similar way I can find an opportunity to say "I am a Christian. I follow Christ."

What do we have to be ashamed of? Paul certainly wasn't.

He declares, **"I am not ashamed of the gospel." (1:16)**

Then salvation comes through **belief**.

"If you . . . believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (v 9)

It is interesting that Paul singles out the resurrection as the one item of Christian doctrine above all others.

There are a number of reasons for this.

First, Christians believe that Jesus not only was raised from the dead 2000 years ago. He is alive today.

Second, because Jesus lives we can live too.

For we share in his resurrection life.

Third, if the resurrection of Jesus is true than everything else falls into place. For example if God can raise Jesus from the dead then the virgin birth is a piece of cake for him.

So believing in the resurrection of Jesus is what it means to be saved.

Another word for belief is trust and Paul notes, **"Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (v 11)**

Now we might get the idea from this order that confession comes before belief. There are some groups who have built a doctrine on this. They talk about declaring the word of faith and teach that by confessing something it will happen.

But that is not what Paul is saying as it is clear from the next verse where he reverses the order of confession and belief to show us that they are just two sides of the same coin.

In verse 10 he explains, **"For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."** (v 10)

The point is that heart and mouth, inward belief and outward confession belong together. Confession without faith is vain but faith without confession is spurious.

The way of salvation is also found in **calling**.

Paul issues this wonderful invitation, **"Everyone who calls on the name on the name of the Lord will be saved."** (v 13)

Do you see what Paul is doing here?

He is providing as many doorways to the house of salvation as he can. Some of us will identify with the picture of faith, others confession, others belief and here the Apostle talks about calling on God.

If you desire to be saved let me urge you to call on God today.

Pray, "Lord Jesus, please save me."

That is calling on his name and if you truly mean it you will be saved.

Next Paul talks about **THE MEANS OF SALVATION**.

Paul is convinced that salvation is God's doing.

It comes about through faith in Christ.

Two of the most important words to the Apostle are **"In Christ."**

He uses that expression 11 times in Romans alone.

Paul is a man **in Christ**. His whole life is wrapped up **in Christ**.

But that does not mean he has no part to play in bringing salvation to his people and he identifies three particular roles that we have as Christians in assisting God in his work of salvation.

The first is **hearing**.

Paul asks a practical question.

"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?" (v 14)

It is essential that people hear the gospel.

That hearing takes place in a physical setting.

Paul used synagogues and homes.

Many of us hear the gospel in a church building.

If this sanctuary had not been built. If people had not given to make it possible we would not be hearing the gospel today.

Even though some people hear the gospel on radio or television or on their iPod that message has usually originated in a church building.

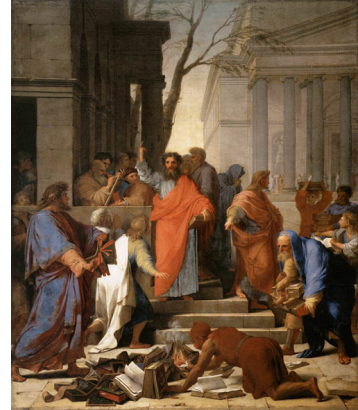
Some people hear the gospel in the words of a book. But that book was written by an individual who usually received their Christian training in a church building.

So there is this very practical dimension to people confessing with their mouth, believing in their heart and calling on the name of the Lord. And that is why we need to construct buildings and meeting places so that people can hear.

The second practical dimension of enabling people to be saved is **preaching**.

Paul continues, **"How can they hear without someone preaching to them?" (v 14)**

Paul believed in God's sovereignty in salvation and Christ's sufficiency for salvation but he also knew that he had a part to play and that was to preach. So he traveled all over Asia and Europe on four missionary journeys preaching the good news.



At times Paul's preaching was immensely costly to him.

He was beaten, imprisoned, shipwrecked and left for dead but it was all a necessary part of bringing God's salvation.

In a sense Paul is answering his own prayer in verse one.

He is saying, "God I want you to save my people, and I am willing for you to use me."

Now we look at this word "preaching" and perhaps think it doesn't apply to us for we are not preachers. But the biblical word *kerusso* doesn't just refer to standing in a pulpit.

It means to be a herald, to proclaim and to publish.

One scholar translates it "gossiping the gospel."

We are all good at gossiping. We can put that gift to godly use. Preaching simply means sharing the hope of Christ to another person. It may be informally over coffee or sitting beside them on a car journey. That is what it means to be a preacher.

And if you are a preacher then you have lovely feet for the Apostle declares, **"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." (v 15)**

He is quoting from Isaiah. The context is that the messenger with the beautiful feet announced that God had defeated Israel's enemies and that the Messiah was reigning.

And that is our hopeful message to the world.

Salvation also requires **sending**.

Paul continues to pursue his argument as he asks, **"How can they preach unless they are sent?" (v 15)**

In Paul's day and ours there were entire cities where the gospel was unknown. Someone needed to be sent. That required an element of organization and planning and financial support.

That is what the church of Antioch did when it set apart Paul and Barnabas and sent them off to Cyprus, Turkey, and Syria.

It is what we are doing in Guinea.

We are sending missions teams and we are sending funds so that people hear the good news.



This practical aspect of salvation is reflected in our Sharing Hope Campaign. We want to raise \$4.7 million to build the surgical wing at the Compassion Evangelical Hospital in Guinea and The Center here at Autumn Ridge.



There is nothing particularly special about these buildings.

But there is something very special about what is going to happen in the buildings.

I want us to reflect on that for a moment because it is hard to get enthusiastic about bricks and mortar but it is easy to be excited about changed lives, especially when those are our children, our grandchildren and the people we love.

We care for this community in which we live and when we see how a building like The Center can impact our community for good we want to make it happen.

If we use this building to introduce people to salvation it will result in less crime in our community as people become lovers of God. It will result in less drunkenness and drug use as young people find something better to do. It will result in fewer broken families and couples find that the Holy Spirit is the glue that holds a marriage together. Above all it will result in more people finding hope in Jesus Christ.

Next week we will present our **pledge cards** for the Sharing Hope Campaign.

Some of you have asked me, "How much shall I give?"

I cannot tell you that.

You have to make that decision before God.

Paul was always raising money for needy people.

He gave this advice to the Corinthians, **"Each person should give what he had decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7)**

Paul's emphasis in his teaching on giving is not on an equal amount but an equal sacrifice because our situations all differ.

I can tell you how the leadership of your church has given.
 So far they have committed **\$804,000**.
 That is 17 percent of the total.
 We are well on the way.

I can also tell you how a student in our congregation gave.
 This young person wanted to do everything they could to share hope. They gave \$1,000 which I suspect is a very large part of that person's savings. This student grew up in our ministry. They enjoyed the gym in our old building. They wanted other young people to have that opportunity.

That degree of generosity was a tremendous example to me.
 To be honest this isn't the best time for our family to be thinking about a capital campaign. We will have three children in college next September. However, Gretchen and I have learned in 32 years of marriage that we cannot out give God.

From our very first paycheck we have had the practice of giving 10 percent of our income to God's work.
 Most of it we give to our church but we also support other Christian organizations.

Like you we have been asking, "How much should we give?"
 It was Gretchen who said, "Let's give a second tenth of our joint income each year for three years to Sharing Hope.
 That is what we will do because we see the importance of sharing hope in a world that is largely without hope.
 It will be challenging to live on 80% of our income for three years but we lived on far less when we were first married and we thrived on it. While our children's education is important so is the spiritual education of the children of our church.

We want to save lives in Guinea and we want the children of our church and community to have a place to play so that they look forward to coming to church and hearing the gospel of Christ.

I know that some of us can't give anything right now.
 Times are really tough and rather than you give anything to the church I want the church to help you through these difficult days. But some of us have seen God provide and we want to thank him for all that he has done for us.

Let us be very clear. We cannot buy our salvation. It is all of grace.
 We cannot make God love us any more than he already does by what we give.
 Rather our pledge to Sharing Hope is an expression of our gratitude for the salvation God has given us and our longing that others would know Christ too.
 So as we bring our prayer cards we say with Paul, "My heart's desire and prayer to God is that they may be saved."