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Romans 9:1-5

God's Anguish

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.

As one reads the book of Romans, one cannot help but notice the difference between chapters 8 and 9. Chapter 8 is full of promise:

- There is no more condemnation for those in Christ (8:1)
- The Spirit gives life to our mortal bodies (8:11)
- We are the children of God and fellow heirs of Christ (8:12-17)
- All things work for good to those who love God and are called according to his purposes (8:28)
- We have been predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ (8:29)
- God is for us (8:31)
- Nothing can separate us from the love of God (8:35-39)

Chapter 9, in comparison, is full of pain: “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart” (9:2).

There is something refreshing about chapter 9. It is not that I want people to experience sorrow and anguish. Well, there might be a few people. What is refreshing is the honesty and love behind these words.

Too often, we think love is perfume, flowers, and walks along the beach at sunset. These things are nice. They are romantic. They are not love.

I once had a girlfriend who thought life was supposed to be only romance. She was sweet. She said sweet things. She wrote sweet notes. God bless her for being so sweet. However, after a few weeks of dating, I broke up with her. My pastor asked why. I told him, “Candy is sweet, but if that is all you eat, you will surely get a stomachache.”

Too many people think Christianity is all sweetness. People think of Christians as people who dress nice, speak nice, and act nice. Like Ned Flanders or Mr. Rogers.

I understand why the world thinks Christians are this way. Our television evangelists wear \$5000 suits and say things such as, “Turn your scars into stars.” Now isn’t that sweet! It is the kind of Christianity that gives the world a stomachache!

Christianity, like love, is much more than perfume, flowers and walks on the beach at sunset. Christianity is messy, scandalous, and filled with pain. Christianity is Christ dying on the cross in order to save a lost and condemned world. Of course, there will be pain.

The reason for Paul's great sorrow and unceasing anguish is Israel's rejection of Christ. Paul has a personal interest in Israel. He is a Jew. The people rejecting the gospel are his very brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, teachers and friends. This is as personal and as important as it gets.

We need to remember this because too often churches focus on things of little importance. Recently, my friend preached a sermon on how not to complain. Talk about an unimportant sermon. I hope people in his congregation complained about the sermon. However, he is my friend. I need to remind him of what our seminary professor would say, "Did Jesus have to die in order for you to preach that sermon?"

With the reality that his brethren have rejected Christ, Paul is not concerned with being nice. He is concerned with their salvation. In fact, Paul says, "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" (9:3). In other words, Paul is willing to be cut off in order to save Israel.

In the book of Exodus, Moses is willing to do the same. After the people had made the golden calf, Moses said to God, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written" (Exodus 32:30-32).

We can understand this. All of us have great sorrow over loved ones who reject Christ. We would give anything for them to know Jesus. We have cried after conversations with them. We have labored in prayer for them. They are our kindred. They are our flesh and blood.

This pain is so terrible that it often turns into despair. It makes us question everything. Maybe it is our fault. Maybe it is their fault. Maybe it is God's fault. Does God really keep his promises?

You get a sense of Paul's despair in verse 4 and 5, "Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen" (9:4-5). In other words, Israel has a great advantage. Surely, they should believe. Yet, they do not. As St. John tells us, "He came to his own, and his own received him not!" (John 1:11).

If we take a step back from these words, we can see that they are not so much a testimony of Israel's failure, rather they are a testimony of God's fidelity. In eight ways, we see how God broke into this world to love his people. He spoke to all the patriarchs. He sent Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. After the people failed, he sent the judges and then the prophets. He was even willing to come himself so that his people will believe.

You see, as much as this passage is about Paul's anguish, it really is about God's anguish. An anguish that stops at nothing to save us. If it means putting on flesh, so be it! If it means searching in the wilderness for a lost sheep, so be it! If it means becoming a curse, so be it! "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'" (Galatians 3:13).

Even today, in this very place, God is breaking in to have us. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus enters into bread and wine for you. He even invites you to come to the table. Come you who have no money. Come you who are sinners. Come you who have broken hearts. Come and receive bread and wine. Christ's body and blood. There is enough to go around. There is enough for the whole world. Invite you friends and family. It is not about being nice. It is about God's love for you!

**In Jesus' Name,
Amen**