

GOSPEL LONGINGS
ROMANS 9:1-5

What makes you sad? What makes your heart ache? What are your greatest sorrows?

We likely have similar kinds of lists of sad things:

- ✓ Illness of a loved family member
- ✓ Cancer and terminal diseases in children (I was often profoundly sad walking halls of Cooks Hosp)
- ✓ Broken and unreconciled relationships
- ✓ Civil injustice — foolish and ungodly decisions by courts
- ✓ Cultural rejection of morality (pick your favorite topic — there are many)

Where does the rejection of the gospel fit on that list? When people have heard the gospel and reject it, does that grieve you? When people who should know the gospel and should embrace the gospel because they have heard it clearly spoken, and they reject it anyway, are you sad?

How badly do you want unbelievers to know Christ? Does your heart break for irreligious religious people — for unbelieving religious people? Specifically, do you grieve for the lostness of God's chosen people, Israel? And what does their unbelief say about God and His relationship to us? Has the gospel failed? Or even more, has God been unfaithful to His promises?

As we open Romans 9, there is a dramatic shift in tone. Paul ends Romans 8 with a rejoicing, victorious benediction. Then Romans 9 begins with no transition word or phrase, and with a blunt statement of grief. It seems that this chapter is disharmonious with all that has preceded it. What is Paul doing? He is addressing a question that most certainly would have been in the minds of his Roman readers.

Romans 8 is victorious. But astute readers will remember that the book is an explanation of the gospel and that gospel is integrally tied to the Israelites:

- ✓ The gospel is given to the Jew first (1:16)
- ✓ The gospel is rooted in the OT principle of faith (1:17)
- ✓ The gospel is given through Christ who was promised by the prophets (1:2), and who was born as a descendent of David (1:3).

The gospel is inextricably intertwined with Israel and God's promises to Israel. And the nation of Israel rejected Christ. She not only rejected, but she mocked, crucified, and killed Christ. She wanted no part with Him. The promises that were made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the 12 sons of Jacob — and then to Moses, David, and Jeremiah — have gone unfulfilled. Israel remained in unbelief, and still is in unbelief today.

By all appearances, Israel should have believed. She was God's chosen nation. She had unsurpassed rights and privileges. And she did not believe. Here are the unspoken questions Paul is addressing in this passage:

- ✓ If Israel did not believe, what happened to her and what will happen to her?
- ✓ And what will happen to us who as Gentiles are not part of God's chosen nation?
- ✓ Will God save us and keep us? Or is our future as uncertain as Israel's seems to be?

The question of Romans 9:1-5 is —

WHEN THE GOSPEL APPEARS TO FAIL, HAS GOD FAILED?

Underlying that question are three longings expressed by Paul in this passage:

1. **The Longing for Gospel SECURITY (Context)** — Is God faithful?
2. **The Longing for Gospel GROWTH (vv. 1-3)** — Is the gospel powerful?
3. **The Longing for the Gospel for ISRAEL (vv. 4-5)** — Is Israel disinherited?

1. The Longing for Gospel SECURITY (context) — Is God faithful?

- As we come to Romans 9, there is a dramatic shift, as we noted. Romans 8 is celebratory joy; Romans 9 begins with a lament akin to a funeral dirge. Paul's tone changes, but there are also other transitions.

• The emphasis on the Godhead changes in Romans 9-11:

- ✓ In Romans 8, the Spirit of God is mentioned by name 20x. In Romans 9-11, He is mentioned 1x.
- ✓ In Romans 1-8, Jesus Christ is mentioned by name 58x; in Romans 9-11, He is named 7x.
- ✓ In Romans 1-8, God is mentioned 108x; in Romans 9-11, He is named 25x.
- ✓ The emphasis in these chapters shifts to the activity of God the Father and His sovereignty — particularly His sovereignty over salvation.

• The writing style changes in Romans 9-11:

- ✓ In Romans 9-11, the name "Jew" is mentioned only twice, while "Israel" is mentioned 11x. The shift is subtle, but Paul is de-emphasizing their race and culture and emphasizing their nationality and their relationship to God as His covenantal people. That's important as Paul asks the question whether God has been unfaithful and violated His covenant with Israel.
- ✓ The concept of *mercy* dominates these chapters. The verb "to be merciful" appears 7x in these chapters, but only once in the rest of the book; the noun, "mercy" appears 2x in Rom. 9-11 and only once in the rest of the book. It is suggested that "mercy" is the keyword of these chapters (cf. 9:15-16, 18; 11:30-32). God is sovereign, but He is also merciful in that sovereignty.
- ✓ The Old Testament dominates these chapters:
 - There are 63 quotations from the OT in Romans — more than any other book.
 - There are 33 quotations from the OT in Romans 9-11 — more than half the OT quotations in the book of Romans are in these three chapters.
 - With that emphasis Paul is affirming the ongoing plan of God for Israel established in the OT has not changed; he is also affirming that the plan of God for the Gentiles is not something new; it was established in the OT.
 - This is also a reminder about how we defend theological positions: Paul does not appeal to his own superior intellect or wisdom; he appeals to the Scriptures. He is proving to all his readers — both Jews and Gentiles in Rome — that what he believes and teaches are not merely his ideas, but they are the ideas of God as they have been consistently revealed in the OT. And particularly critical as he explains the sovereignty of God in salvation and the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the church. So he appeals to Scripture to affirm his doctrine. As we teach and instruct, our approach should be the same: what we have to say has no validity unless it is revealed in the Scriptures. Our job is not to give our opinions; we are compelled to explain God's unerring truth.

- These changes in style and structure help reveal a persistent question in these verses and throughout these three chapters: is the gospel secure and is God faithful?
- There are multiple unspoken questions about God and Israel in Romans 9-11 [paraphrased from MacArthur, 2-6]:
 - ✓ If the gospel of Jesus Christ offered salvation to all Gentiles, then has God forsaken His chosen people, Israel (1:16)? Have they lost their advantage (3:1) and has God failed (9:6, 14)?
 - ✓ If salvation is *from* the Jews and *to* the Jews, why did Israel and her religious leaders reject the Messiah, Jesus, from being their King and Savior? Why did they harden their hearts (11:7-10)?
 - ✓ Yes, individual Jews might be saved by Christ, but what about the plan to save the nation of Israel — did God discard His people from His salvation plan (11:19-21)?
 - ✓ If God did not keep His salvation plan with Israel, then can the Gentiles be secure in His salvation plan for them? If Israel isn't saved and Israel is God's special people, then what will happen to us?
 - ✓ At the heart of these three chapters is the question of God's faithfulness — is God faithful? Paul is anticipating that question, and all three of these chapters exude God's faithfulness to His people — both Israelites and Gentiles (11:1, 11, 22-23, 26-28).
 - ✓ Is God faithful? Yes. God is eternally faithful. As Paul says elsewhere, God is faithful — He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). Because He is God, He must be faithful and can only be faithful to who He is and what He says.

2. The Longing for Gospel GROWTH (vv. 1-3) — Is the gospel powerful?

- What Paul is about to say will sound preposterous to his readers so he asserts the validity of his coming statement in three ways in v. 1:
 - ✓ ***I am telling the truth in Christ*** = Notice that he doesn't just say he is telling the truth, but he is telling the truth *in Christ*. He means that his words have been conformed to his position in Christ; he is a truth-teller because of his union with Christ. His words are carefully chosen to reflect the character of Christ and His accountability to Christ. He is compelled to be truthful because of Christ.
 - ✓ ***I am not lying*** = He uses the negative of "I am telling the truth" to affirm the same reality: "A man, even a truthful man, may exaggerate his own feelings; but in the eyes of Paul there is something so holy in Christ, that in the pure and luminous atmosphere of His felt presence no lie, and not even any exaggeration, is possible." [Godet]
 - ✓ ***My conscience testifies within me...*** = The function of the conscience is to defend or accuse one's actions, depending on their truthfulness (2:15). All men have this conscience. Paul appeals to his conscience as an affirmation several times (Acts 23:1; 2 Cor. 1:12; 4:2; 5:11...).
 - But a conscience can be misinformed and misguided and even closed off (2 Tim. 4:2). A conscience is only useful when it conforms to the truth. Evil people corrupt their consciences.
 - Paul says his is uncorrupted — it testifies to him ***in the Holy Spirit*** = i.e., his conscience has

been informed and trained by the Holy Spirit (and Scripture), so his conscience is right. “My conscience affirms that I am telling the truth and speaking consistently with my training from the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit’s word.”

- ✓ These three statements affirm that what he says he desires is a true statement.
- Having affirmed the truthfulness of what he will say, in **v. 2** he indicates that this is his great longing:
 - ✓ **I have great sorrow** = His sorrow is a state of mind — so it is not a passing sorrow, but persistent. And it is a “great” sorrow. Significantly, Paul always uses the word “sorrow” to express grief for spiritual concerns; the greatest sorrows are spiritual losses (e.g., 2 Cor. 7:10).
 - ✓ **and unceasing grief** = Here Paul is emphasizing the inward pain of his anguish; and it is unrelenting. These two phrases should be understood as synonymous.
 - ✓ Paul’s sorrow is “marked by its greatness, its continuance, and its depth.” [Murray]
 - ✓ What could cause such a grief and sorrow in Paul’s heart? It’s a yearning for something he lacks.
- What is this bold thing that Paul desires? He longs for the salvation of the Jewish people. Is that all? No! This is virtually a consuming passion of his. He wants the expansion of the gospel in every place; he especially wants it for his fellow Israelites (cf. **10:1, 18-21**). Paul grieves for their lostness.
 - ✓ The extent of his grief is revealed in the audacity of his statement in **v. 3** —
 - ✓ **For I could wish myself accursed** = “I could almost pray to be cursed by God....” The word “accursed” is *anathema* — experience the condemnation and wrath of God.
 - He clarifies what he means by “curse” when he says, **separated from Christ** — i.e., separated from the blessing of being with Christ in glory — separated from the One who was life to Paul (Phil. 1:21; 3:8, 20; Col. 3:4).
 - He is not saying that he could be cursed and replace them in condemnation.
 - But his desire is something like, “I would pray for my own condemnation, if it were permissible for me to pray that and if it would benefit them.”
 - His sentiment is like Moses’ with Israel and golden calf (Dt. 32:32) and David over Absalom (2 Sam. 18:33).
 - Most of all, this is like Christ, who not only “almost prayed,” but He actually became the curse for man; He did become our substitute (Rom. 8:32; **Gal. 3:13**; 2 Cor. 5:21; Is. 53:5-6, 8).
 - ✓ He wishes and longs to do this **for the sake of my brethren** — his *kinsmen* — fellow countrymen and Israelites. They were the people to whom Christ first came and to whom the gospel first went (1:16), and Paul wants them to know salvation and freedom that is revealed in Christ.
- How badly do you long for the salvation of the lost? Do we care that the unbelieving are going to Hell? Do we care that people we know are lost and lost means *eternally* lost and *eternally* under God’s wrath?
 - ✓ John Knox: “Give me Scotland or I die.”
 - ✓ Henry Martyn, missionary to India: “O that I were a flame of fire in the hand of God.”

- ✓ C. T. Studd: "Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell; I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."
- ✓ Charles Spurgeon: "If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for."
- ✓ The end of all people who don't know Christ will end badly. We have no ability to understand completely how bad "bad" is, but we need to work at it. One thing I do is I read books about evangelism annually to remind me of the gospel imperative.
- ✓ I also need to incorporate more books about Heaven and Hell. So, one evening this week I was reading a book and as RJ walked by me in the living room she asked, "What are you reading?" I held up the book: *A Visitor's Guide to Hell*. "Ohhh. That sounds depressing..." It wasn't completely depressing, but I do need to read it. I do need to be reminded of the gravity of rejecting Christ. I need to have my heart renewed to be fearful for those who do not know Jesus as their Savior.
- ✓ And we must be willing to be bold with the gospel because of what we know about Hell.
 - Remind yourself regularly about what the gospel is: grace, man, God, Christ, faith, hope.
 - Pray for yourself and others to be bold with the gospel (Eph. 6:18-20) — like Paul, we are ambassadors, we are inclined to cowardice, but we are still compelled to speak.
 - Keep a list of those who are unsaved who need salvation and pray regularly for them (not just for people you know, but for family of people in our church body as well).
- ✓ Paul would have been willing to consign himself to Hell if others could be redeemed that way. How extreme are you and I willing to be so that unbelievers will know Jesus?

3. The Longing for the Gospel for Israel (vv. 4-5) — Is Israel disinherited?

- Having brought up those who share the same physical nationality as him, Paul then reveals all the advantages of the Jewish people. He reveals nine advantages:
 1. They are **Israelites**. This is the first time he uses this term in Romans (he uses it 13x in chs. 9-11). To call them Israelites means Paul is not emphasizing their cultural distinctions with Gentiles (2:28), but their relationship to God and His promises to them. "Israelite" is not just a national designation, it is a religious designation (Eph. 2:12).
 2. They are **adopted as sons**. Similar to the believer who has been adopted by God, through Christ, the nation of Israel was given adoptive son status by God (Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1; Is. 1:2; Jer. 31:9). He does not mean that every Israelite will be saved; but he does mean that the nation does enjoy special status as God's sons — protected and blessed — and one day the nation will repent...
 3. They saw **the glory**. This refers to the Shekinah glory of God that filled the Tabernacle and Temple. It is God's manifestation of His nature (Ex. 40:34-5; Ezk. 1:28; Heb. 9:5). No other nation had this special revelation from God. *It was a sign of His presence with them* (as w/ pillar of fire).

4. They received **the covenants**. Paul doesn't specify which covenants he means: undoubtedly the Abrahamic, and probably the Palestinian, Davidic, and New. His emphasis is not so much on *which* covenants, but on the Author of the covenants and that they are unbreakable (Gal. 3:16-18).
 5. They had **the Law**, which demonstrated the love and nearness of God (Dt. 4:5-8).
 6. They were entrusted with **temple service**. This reminds them that after the wandering in the wilderness, they were brought permanently into the land and given a Temple and the privilege of responsibilities for corporate worship, and the blessings through that worship (Ex. 29:43-46).
 7. They received **the promises**. These are not the covenants, but other promises from God (15:8), which reveal His faithfulness to them. He is faithful in all things at all times to the nation.
 8. They had **the fathers**, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his 12 sons. God was faithful to the fathers, and He used the fathers to reveal His faithfulness to His people. They are beloved by God through the patriarchs and everything they would become came through God's promises to the fathers (11:28).
 9. And supremely, the **Christ** (Messiah) **is from** them. The culminating and pre-eminent blessing of being an Israelite is that Jesus the Messiah came *from* them, *to* them and *for* them (Jn. 1:11, 14-18).
 - Notice that the Messiah does not belong to them, but **is from** them. That's important: "the Israelites, for all the privileges they enjoy, have not, as a group, come into genuine relationship with God's Messiah and the salvation that he has brought." [Moo] But one day they will...
 - This privilege cannot be taken away from them; Jesus is and always be a Jew.
 - Notice also what Paul says about Jesus:
 - ... He is a man — He is **according to the flesh**, that is, He has a literal body and was born like any other man and had a physical heritage and lineage (and could thus be our substitute).
 - ... He is also God — **He is over all**, sovereign over all creation and men (Eph. 4:6). Because He is God, He is able to make atonement for sin. In fact, He is **God** (who is) **blessed forever**.
- What can you say about all these advantages?
 - ✓ If Israel had all these advantages and didn't repent, were they disinherited? No (9:6; 11:1). God is faithful to His promises. He is and will be faithful to Israel and He is and will be to us.
 - ✓ These affirmations of Israel's position are also reminders that religious privilege is a wonderful advantage, but it's useless without faith in Christ.
 - ✓ If you are depending on some kind of religious privilege, it's not enough to save you. If all those privileges wouldn't save Israel, your advantages won't save you.
 - ✓ You must repent and you must believe in Jesus: Rom. 10:9, 11-13. Will you begin believing today?
 - ✓ If you already believe, give thanks as we come to the communion table for the one who is Savior and who will remain faithful to save you into and through eternity.

BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36