

Hooray for Crockett!

Chosen...Before Time Began – Part I

Romans 9:1-3

Introduction

Periodically I will hear of some rumor about our church circulating in the community. One of our evangelism teams heard a new one recently. They went to a home to visit a newcomer who, during the course of their conversation, asked about a rumor. The visitor said, “I’m a little concerned because I’ve heard that Colonial is bankrupt.”

I thought that was fascinating – our church is bankrupt – and no one told me! Perhaps they had heard about our deficit two years ago, along with so many other ministries that felt the effects of 9/11 and a down-turned economy.

This past year, however, our church ended the year with contributions of nearly one hundred thousand dollars over our budget. And this fiscal year, which we just began three weeks ago, saw us take a great step of faith in adding to our budget more than seven thousand dollars a week! That is the second largest increase in our seventeen year history. It is a nearly four hundred thousand dollar increase to our annual budget. If that is bankruptcy, let’s have more of it!

I praise God for the generous commitment of our body to giving. We do not use gimmicks; we do not manipulate emotions, we just put out the need and God’s people give. We do not try to obligate people by preaching storehouse tithing, because the church is not a storehouse. We do not store grain and corn and cattle in here. The church is not the storehouse of Malachi, it is a funnel through which God subsidizes His mission on earth. And, we are fortunate enough to be involved in it!

However, aren’t you glad people are spreading rumors about us that aren’t true – aren’t you glad people are talking about us? I think of it as free advertising!

There is no telling what our evangelism teams are going to encounter! I enjoy reading the weekly updates on the way our visitation teams are winning people to faith in Jesus Christ. Did you know that someone is coming to faith in Christ through the effort of someone or some ministry of this church at the average rate of one person every day? One person every day for Christ!

I received an e-mail a few days ago from one of the ladies in our church who had just visited a brand new couple to our church. She wrote that the couple had gone to see the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, and were troubled by it. They were basically un-churched, although they had a background of attending church periodically. One of them mentioned to a co-worker how troubling this movie had been and the co-worker suggested they go to church again. Where? This co-worker said, “Why don’t you try Colonial on Tryon Road.”

The couple came the very next Sunday, which was Easter Sunday. This woman wrote, “The sermon gave them a deep hunger to know what it meant to have Jesus in their lives and how to have the forgiveness of Jesus in their hearts, so they filled out a card and put it in the offering plate.”

The following Wednesday night, the evangelism team visited their home. This lady said in her e-mail that when they got to the house, the couple’s sixteen month old twins were requiring attention (that is

probably an understatement!), they had dinner in the oven, and a dog was running around. They invited the team in anyway and asked question after question. Finally, the team had the opportunity to share the truth of the gospel with this couple and they eagerly bowed their heads and prayed to invite the Lord Jesus into their hearts and lives.

Amen?

Hey, let the rumors fly and do not worry about them; let the critics multiply. The truth is, we are bankrupt – we are. It is true, in a way – we have discovered the utter bankruptcy of the human heart and we have run to the city of refuge for everlasting help. We have, like beggars, fallen before the living Lord for mercy and have discovered in Him all the forgiveness and grace our bankrupt souls could ever want or need.

Amen? Say, “Hallelujah!” Say, “Glory to God!” Say, “Praise the Lord!” Let the rumors begin that I have turned Pentecostal.

I want for us to be thrilled together with the news of conversion; the news of God’s glory revealed to an unbeliever; the news of a man or woman, boy or girl being brought out of darkness into the marvelous light of Christ, born again to life everlasting. That is what we are all about! That is why we are in the world! We are the agents of reconciliation!

Discipleship Journal ran an article by Jean Fleming, about an incident that occurred in her church. The pastor announced from the pulpit that a young elementary school boy named Crockett, had given his heart and life to Christ that very week. Another boy, a little younger – around the age of 5 – jumped up on the seat of his pew, thrust his fist into the air, and yelled, “Yeah for Crockett!”

It was totally spontaneous . . . unconscious joy over the news of this boy’s salvation. Everyone in the church turned to stare . . . the boy’s mother was mortified, as she pulled him down and shushed him still. Too bad. The entire congregation should have stood with him [and shouted along with the angels, “Yeah for Crockett . . . Yeah for Crockett!”]¹

If there was ever a man who would have stood and shouted, “Yeah for Crockett,” it would have been the apostle Paul. What love for the sinner; what passion for the gospel he had.

Today, as we return to our study of Romans, we will read a rare autobiographical statement that allows us see into the heart of the apostle Paul. We will discover a heart that models enthusiasm and passion for lost people. In fact, he will say some

things that will deeply convict the heart of every believer.

While you are opening your Bible to Romans, chapter 9, you need to know that chapter 9 begins a new section in this letter. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 form a section of thought that I am entitling, “Chosen Before Time Began.” Romans:

- chapter 9 deals with Israel’s past;
- chapter 10 deals with Israel’s present;
- chapter 11 deals with the nation Israel’s future.

The primary questions that Paul will answer in the next section of his letter are the questions:

- What happens to Israel now?!
- Now that they have rejected the Messiah, how does the gospel of Christ relate to them?
- Will they be thrown away by God forever?
- Have they lost their status as God’s chosen people?

Paul Reveals His Love For Israel

In the opening verses of chapter 9, Paul begins to lay the groundwork for his answers to these questions. He:

- first tells them of his special burden for them as a nation;
- secondly, reminds them of their special heritage as a nation;
- then, thirdly, tells them of their danger as a nation.

I think the order of Paul’s remarks is a powerful example for every believer today, because:

- first, he told them how much he cared;
- then, he reminded them of who they were;
- finally, he rebuked them for what they had done.

We could learn a lot from Paul’s approach.

Have you ever heard the phrase,

People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.

I have heard that and read that in several different sources, and every time I hear it or read it, I am convicted all over again of my own tendency to turn it upside down.

Give me someone to debate the impeccability of Christ and I will enjoy knocking down the arguments against it. Bring someone along who likes to argue

the immutability of God's sovereign will, or the economic function of the Trinity and I will enjoy every minute of it.

How do we typically deal with lost people? We:

- tell them where they are wrong;
- who they are before God;
- then, maybe, how much we care.

I remember when one of my sons was in elementary school, he came running in the house one day announcing that a little boy in the neighborhood had just gotten saved.

I said, "Really?"

"Yes sir."

"Well, what did you say to him?" I asked.

"I just told him that when he died he was gonna go to hell . . . was that what he wanted? He said, 'No way.' So we prayed."

That is my little theologian!

I could not argue with his theology – hell is real and unbelievers go there one day unless they are redeemed. His theology was not a problem; his methodology could be developed!

What I find interesting is that the greatest theologian who ever lived, other than our Lord Jesus, of course, could have, at this point in his letter, launched into the future state of the disobedient nation of Israel, and their coming judgment – complete with facts and data to prove his point – without ever connecting with his audience. He will rattle off the data in a few verses, by the way.

However, he does not address the issue of his Jewish kinsmen with theology first. He addresses them first, with his love – deep, self-sacrificing love.

We are often so concerned about someone's soul that we forget about their heart.

I would expect Paul to deal with the national soul of Israel – what they did wrong; where they were headed; how they could be rescued and avoid judgment from God. There is hell to shun and heaven to gain, right?! And he will do and say basically all of that.

First, however, as he begins to specifically explain the past, present, and future of this nation, Paul begins with an incredible statement of love. Look at verses 1 through 3 of Romans, chapter 9.

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and

unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,

Can you believe that? Do you think Paul has their attention now?

People do not care how much you know, until they know how much you care. Before Paul gave them his theology, he showed them his heart.

The truth is, none of the Jews would have ever believed that Paul cared anything for them. To them, Paul was Judas. He had betrayed Judaism. He had abandoned his mission, which was directly given to him by the Sanhedrin, to go after the Christians and put them out of business.

So he did! Paul was the leading persecutor of Christianity – until that day on the Damascus road when the glory of the risen Savior knocked him off his horse and brought him to his knees in true repentance and conversion to Christ.

Now Paul was one of them – a Christian. He was not persecuting Christianity, he was promoting Christianity.

Acts, chapter 9, begins with Paul "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" and he "went to the high priest, and asked him for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus" that would authorize him to take any believers found there as prisoners to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2). Yet, eighteen verses later, Acts records that Paul "began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (Acts 9:20). No wonder "all those hearing him continued to be amazed" (Acts 9:21).ⁱⁱ

This converted lawyer who had come to destroy the disciples of the Lord, now stands to defend them! Paul will become public enemy number one to the Jewish nation and leadership. He is preaching against their great prophet and lawgiver, Moses. He is preaching against their system of worship and sacrifice and priestly system.

The Jews will try everything to silence him. Paul wrote in II Corinthians, chapter 11, verses 24 and 26,

Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes, . . . in frequent dangers from my countrymen.

Once when Paul returned to Jerusalem, more than forty zealous Jews bound themselves with an oath that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12-13).

However, this is not the remarkable news – this is the expected news. The remarkable news, the unbelievable truth would not be that the Jewish nation considered Paul a traitor and that the Jewish leaders hated Paul and wanted him dead, the remarkable news is in Romans, chapter 9, verse 1 – that Paul happened to love them.

Three witnesses called by Paul in defense of the truth that he loves the Jewish people

It was almost too much to believe. That is why Paul called to his defense three different witnesses.

Christ

1. First, Paul wrote in verse 1a,

I am telling the truth in Christ . . .

One author wrote,

Paul was calling his Lord and Savior as an indisputable witness. His omniscient, righteous, sovereign, gracious Lord, who perfectly knew Paul's heart and motives, would affirm the truthfulness of the apostle's love for his fellow Jews.ⁱⁱⁱ

That is like placing your hand on a Bible and swearing, “to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God.”

Perhaps you have watched the president of the United States place his hand on the Bible as he is sworn into office. He is, in effect, calling God as his witness to the veracity and integrity of his oath.

I have watched dozens of State Highway Patrolmen taking the oath of a higher rank – placing their hands on Bibles and repeating their oath – bringing God, as it were, into the room as a witness of their truthfulness.

Paul is saying, “I am telling the truth, I am not lying and I’m calling on my Lord and Savior as a witness of the integrity of my words.”

Paul’s conscience

2. Secondly, Paul calls his conscience as a witness. He writes in verse 1b,

. . . my conscience testifies with me . . .

Paul was saying that his inner conscience was agreeing with his outward testimony.

Indwelling Holy Spirit

3. Then Paul adds another witness by writing in verse 1c,

. . . my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit

In other words, “not just my conscience, but my conscience which the indwelling Holy Spirit knows is telling the truth.”

Paul brings the Holy Spirit into this scene.

A conscience can be . . .

It is not enough to say, “My conscience doesn’t bother me about what I’m saying, so it must be right; my conscience doesn’t disturb me in what I’m doing, so I must not be doing anything wrong.”

Deceived and defiled

- A conscience can be deceived and defiled.

Paul would write in Titus, chapter 1, verses 15 and 16,

To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.

They are entirely deceived and their consciences are defiled.

Seared

- A conscience can be seared.

In other words, a conscience can be covered as it were, with scar tissue from sin and corruption. It can become so covered over by the callousness of sin that its voice is muted.

Paul wrote to Timothy, in I Timothy, chapter 4, verses 1 and 2,

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron

Rejected or ignored

- Furthermore, a conscience can be rejected or ignored.

Paul encouraged the believers, in I Timothy, chapter 1, verse 19, to keep,

. . . a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

One of the things that strikes me about Paul is his deep desire to keep a clear conscience. He wrote in I Timothy, chapter 1, verse 5,

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

That is why it meant a lot for him to say, in Romans, chapter 9, verse 1,

. . . my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit.

In other words, “under the dominating control of the Holy Spirit – that I am telling the truth!”

Paul loves the nation Israel enough that he would give up eternal life in heaven that they might know Christ and have eternal life

Finally, the reader says, “Okay Paul . . . enough! You’ve called three witness to stand beside you – the witness of Christ, the witness of your conscience, and the witness of the indwelling Holy Spirit Who verifies your conscience. They all stand and attest to the fact that you are telling the truth. So, just what are you telling the truth about?! What is it that you want us to believe about what you are saying?!”

Look again at verses 2 and 3,

that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,

In other words, “I would be willing to relinquish my eternal home in heaven and spend eternity in hell, if only my nation Israel would follow after Christ.”

Now remember, Paul is not speaking theologically, he is speaking emotionally. He is revealing his heart!

Some might say, “Well, that’s a safe thing to say. Paul knows he can’t lose his salvation, so he’s just blowing smoke to try to look good.”

Remember the three witnesses!

And note that Paul is not saying it was possible – he knew it was not possible. He is saying that if it

were possible, he would go to hell so they could go to heaven.

He is repeating the passion and love of Moses who went before God after the children of Israel made the golden calf and committed acts of idolatry at the very foot of Mount Sinai. In Exodus, chapter 32, verses 31 and 32, we are told,

Then Moses returned to the Lord, and said, “Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if You will, forgive their sin – and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!”

In other words, “Take my life for theirs!”

That is what Paul is saying too.

Some have tried to soften the meaning of Paul’s words by saying that Paul was merely talking about excommunication, or some form of isolation from the synagogue and the early church. They say he did not mean “accursed” in the sense of anything more than that. Surely he was not thinking of anything eternal in these verses!

However, Paul uses the strongest word possible. The words translated “accursed from Christ” begin with the Greek word “anathema”.

In this context it cannot mean mere punishment as discipline, it literally means being given over to divine condemnation.^{iv}

Paul says, “I would welcome divine condemnation if only you would receive divine reconciliation.”

It is impossible to measure this kind of love.

You need to understand, Paul is not talking about just dying for someone else. History is filled with illustrations of bravery and sacrifice, in which people have died so that others could live. Paul is talking about going to hell for someone else.

I do not have it. I must admit to you, dear flock, that I do not have this kind of love. I cannot imagine giving up heaven for anyone. The closest I would ever consider it would be for my wife and children – but never for someone I did not know, and certainly never for someone who had only recently tried to kill me; someone who had stoned me and left me for dead; someone who had bound himself with others to never eat or sleep until they took off my head.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is supernatural love.

Moses talked about it, and Paul was open to it, but the only person I know who actually did

something like it was our Lord. The One who became sin for us, who knew no sin; the unblemished Lamb who endured the wrath of the Father – who, because He was God the Son, could bear the eternal brunt of judgment in a matter of moments, He actually paid our hell so we could go to heaven. Christ actually did this for you and me.

Conclusion

We have just begun our discussion in Romans, chapters 9, 10, and 11, and it is God's plan for Israel. What I find so profound in these first verses, is that before Paul revealed the plan of God for Israel, he demonstrated the heart of God for Israel. He demonstrated grief and sorrow over unbelief and love for the unbeliever!

Perhaps the reason more people do not come to faith in Christ through the testimony of our witness is because they hear us talking about God's plan, but they do not see a demonstration of God's love; they hear our theology, but they never hear our heart.

Paul was like the prophet Jeremiah who cried, in Jeremiah, chapter 9, verse 1,

Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for . . . my people.

Paul was like the great priest Samuel who grieved over Saul who had fallen into sin (I Samuel 15:35).

Paul was like David who said, in Psalm, chapter 119, verse 136,

My eyes shed streams of water [run down with tears], because they do not keep Your law.

When was the last time we grieved over sin. When was the last time we wept over the fact that our family, our city, our country, our world is captive and bound for judgment and does not follow after God?

We can be so passionate about interest rates and basketball scores. I know people who are passionate about vitamins. Some are passionate about the latest computer advancement; others about the stock market. The reason we know they are passionate is that when you get around them, the conversation eventually turns to that.

What are we passionate about? When was the last time we stood on our pews and shouted, "Hooray for Crockett . . . Hooray for Crockett!"

The apostle Paul would stand with that little boy, his fist in the air, joining the unseen angelic host as it celebrates the eternal passion and joy of God – another one has been born again.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/25/2004 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Craig Larson, Choice Contemporary Stories and Illustrations (Baker Books, 1998), p. 50.

ⁱⁱ Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, Holman New Testament Commentary: Romans (Nashville, TN, Holman Reference, 2000), p. 279.

ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur, Romans Volume 2 (Chicago, IL, Moody Press, 1994), p. 8.

^{iv} Ralph Earle, Word Meanings in the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1989), p. 187.