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# Praying for Salvation

## Romans 10:1-4

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(Idea: Prayer comes from desire and desire strengthens as what God says about unbelievers deeply matters to us)

### Introduction

I love to evangelize. There is just something exhilarating about talking with unbelievers about the gospel. Yet, in preparation for this evening's message, I noticed something disturbing in me. I think I talk to unbelievers about Christ more than I talk to Christ about unbelievers. I think I talk about salvation disproportionately more than I pray for salvation. That's disturbing. And that needs to change. And so, I prayed today before I preached that this message titled *Praying for Salvation* will be used of God to change me so that I will be praying for salvation more and more and more until I see Jesus. That is the intended effect I want God to do in me as a result of this message.

Well, how about you? Do you need help in praying for the salvation of others? Are you satisfied with both the fervency and frequency of prayer for those who don't know Jesus? Has your prayer life for unbelievers decreased over time? And when you do pray for the lost, does it sound like you are just reading a prayer list to God with little to no affections behind your requests?

My hope is that this message will give us hope that our prayers will increase in quality and quantity for people without hope and without Christ in this world.

So, how can our praying for salvation increase as a church? How will this happen in your flock? What do you need as an individual that will assist you in praying for salvation? What insights can be gleaned from the Bible that will strengthen our prayers for unbelievers? Is there a certain motivation/stimulation that the Bible might provide in order to pray heartily for unbelievers?

These types of questions will be answered and a practical application for us will be given as we open our Bibles to Romans 10:1-4.

The big idea for this evening's sermon is quite simple: *Praying for salvation for unbelievers comes from longing for salvation for these unbelievers.* We notice this in Romans 10:1 and how heart desire gives rise to praying. Look in your Bible and see this – how prayer relates to and is linked up to desire. You see, what Paul longs for he prays for. It's kind of like what Jesus said: "the mouth speaks **from** that which fills the heart". It's like when we are speaking we are siphoning from something. Desire and words do not originate in the mouth. We speak from our heart's desire.

Romans 10:1 suggests that heart desire is the reservoir from which we draw the fervency and frequency of prayer. When the heart is filled with desire for something we tend to ask for that something. That's the basic idea for tonight's message.

As we pay attention to Romans 10:1-4 we aim to answer two basic questions tonight. 1) Where does prayer for the lost come from? 2) How can this type of prayer increase in our lives? The obvious desired result for this message is that we leave tonight not merely with answers to these two questions but a challenged and changed prayer life for the lost. <pray>

## Context

Let's begin by noticing the context of our paragraph for tonight. Throughout Romans 9, Paul explains why Israel does not believe the gospel and become saved. Throughout his detailed, theologically dense explanation Paul talks about God's sovereign purpose in salvation as the reason for Jews disbelieving that Jesus is the Messiah. God's sovereignty permeates ch.9. The upshot: Those who are chosen by God are saved by God. And those who are not chosen by God and not saved by God. That is from God's perspective.

But as we get to verse 30 in ch.9 a different perspective over this topic arises. The answer to why Israel does not believe in Jesus is different than the first 29 verses but is not in contradiction to the above teaching. Paul stays with the topic of salvation but angles it toward why Gentiles in Rome are getting saved while the Jews are not. His answer centers now on the human heart and what the heart seeks rather than on the emphasis of God's sovereign decrees.

## Text

In effect Paul in 9:30-10:4 says that unlike the Gentiles, the Jews are not getting saved because they seek to do so through compliance to procedures, rules and guidelines instead of through faith in Christ. Take a listen for this theme as I read for us Romans 9:30-10:4

*30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

This passage explains what happened to Israel from the human perspective as Paul examines how Israel rejected the message of salvation—a message which clearly points to faith in Christ. This salvation is available to all people. So Israel's refusal of the gospel is the reason they remain, largely, under judgment.

Paul underwrites this argument with many quotations from the Old Testament showing that both the gospel and Israel's rejection of that message have always been there. To see this, first notice v30-33 and Paul's upside down / inside out irony over this topic.

### **An upside down / inside out irony**

### **v30-33**

In these verses, Paul goes back and forth between Gentiles getting saved and Israel not getting saved. Those who know the Old Testament find these verses somewhat quirky. All throughout the OT Israel is known as God's people and the Gentiles are pagans who knew little of the One True God. They participated in much sin and cared little about being right with a holy God.

Now, since Jesus had come to earth, was crucified on a cross, brought back to life from the dead and brought into heaven to his throne a new day has dawned. The Holy Spirit has been sent to awaken people from their spiritual stupor and draw them into the life found in Christ. Men and women, boys and girls are being saved as they come to life and repent of sins and trust Christ

for salvation. According to these verses this is occurring much more among those who know about God the least instead of those who know about God the most. It's happening among the irreligious and immoral far more than among the religious and moral. This group, according to Romans 2—the religious and moral group:

*...rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent and are sure they are guides to the blind and light for those in darkness and are instructors of the foolish and teachers of children who say "do not steal and do not commit adultery and abhor idols and boast in the law" (rom.2:17-24).*

This group is akin to people today who say: I try hard. I help people when I can. I don't lie. I'm a good spouse, a good parent, a good caretaker of my parents, a good citizen. People like me because I'm a good helper. I'm religious. I go to church. I carry my Bible. I pray before every meal and before I go to bed. I'm a Republican. I'm proud to be an American. I pay my taxes. I don't cheat. I stay out of bars. I find smoking stupid and despicable. And actually I'm offended when some immoral person claims to be saved and now enjoys God's favor. That's ridiculous. Good people have God's favor. Good people are good to be around and have good reason to believe God is pleased with them. THEREFORE, I have confidence that God is pleased with me. He and I are friends. And when I die he will accept me based on what I did throughout my life.

According to v30-33 people who believe like this are those who seek to establish their relationship with God on their own terms. These "good and morally upright" people want credit for their righteousness and desire to demonstrate their prowess by their own efforts. They stumble over Christ rather than submit to Him because earning salvation is more appealing to the flesh than humbly receiving it. They will get the applause from people for a job well done. And then they will see God. Judgment falls on those who create their own foundation of acceptance and the ground rules for God's favor.

Whereas, the other group in these verses are the Gentiles. These are people who know about God the least. They do not know much about the Bible. They act like this life is all there is and so try to design a life of significance and pleasure and wellbeing because this very well might be all you get. They sin. And sin again. They live out their life views before all without blushing. This group according to Romans 2—the irreligious and immoral group:

*Do not honor God or give thanks to him. They become futile in their thinking yet claim to be wise. They love idolatry and fall in love with the creation. They exchange natural relations for those that are contrary to nature. They commit shameless acts. They gossip. They slander. They invent evil. They are foolish and faithless. And yet they have a conscience that accuses them of sin and impending judgment while also tries to excuse them of their sinful desires and behavior (rom.1:24-32; 2:15-16).*

V. 30-33 tell us that this group—the Gentiles—were more responsive to the gospel than the Jews. The irreligious, immoral, trendy, liberal, decadent group saw something of the wonder in the gospel. They began to see their sin as awful. They were awakened to the dread of judgment. They were struck with the mercy of God and the beauty of Christ and the joy of love so much so that they repented from their sin and came to Christ happily and humbly. Whereas, the other group—the

Jews—were upright people who made great neighbors as they paid close attention to procedures, rules and guidelines instead of putting their faith in Christ.

Here are the two groups in the first century in Rome. Here are the two groups in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Springboro.—sinners trusting Christ for salvation and the morally sound seeking to base their future with God on their good works.

So what's Paul's point as he discusses these two groups? How does this play into the topic of prayer? What are we to hear about our own lives that will help us in praying for salvation for unbelievers?

## Application

Paul arguably was the best biblical theologian on earth excluding the God-man Jesus Christ. He wrote 13 letters of the New Testament. He planted and established churches throughout the known world. He was escorted into revelations that others never saw. His grasp on dense and complex theology was staggering. He understood God's eternal degrees. He knew of the nation Israel and how they would become hardened to the glories of the Gospel. He saw and taught redemptive history like none other.

### Truth deeply matters

Now here's the point. All that Paul says about unbelievers deeply matters to him. He was moved when he discussed the unbelief of the Jews. His heart broke for unbelievers whose plight was judgment from God. Nothing about the description of unbelievers was ever for Paul merely academic. Paul taught about the nature of people not in an abstract, theoretical and speculative way. He cried over unbelievers (9:1). He said he had unceasing sorrow over their unbelief.

Listen again to Romans 10:1 – “Brothers, my *heart's desire and prayer to God for them* is that they may be saved”. He did not just talk about and teach about unbelievers as if they are just a category. He did not just have sound theology over their identity and destiny. No! His heart stirred. His desires grew. His passion for their salvation expanded. He ached for them.

This is what we must be aware of tonight beloved. If our prayer life is small for the salvation of unbelievers it is due to the condition of our hearts. Our hearts are not alarmed over unbelievers. They are not swelling in concern for their wellbeing. At times, I fear, we look at upright, morally sound good neighbors and say, “it's nice to have nice people around my life” without reflecting theologically on their identity as enemies of God.

The first question this message tonight answers is: Where does prayer for the lost come from? The answer: It comes from heart desire (see v1). To the degree our hearts yearn for the salvation of an unbeliever we will pray for salvation for that person. To the degree our heart's desire is weak to that degree will we not pray for salvation. We may talk about them but not to God.

Well, if this is a diagnosis for a weak prayer life for unbelievers then what's the remedy? How can our desire for the salvation of unbelievers increase so that our praying for salvation will increase? The following verses tell us what moved the Apostle Paul's heart to desire and to pray for the salvation of the lost. We see how truth deeply matters for Paul. Now we will end the message by drawing out these truths and press them on our hearts so that our prayer life for unbelievers will increase. This is the application of tonight's message.

## Truth #1

## v2-3

The first truth that mattered deeply for Paul and caused him to pray deeply for the salvation of unbelievers is found in v2-3. It reads in the NLT: “I know what enthusiasm they have for God but it is misdirected zeal. For they do not understand God’s way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God’s way they cling to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law”.

The first truth that mattered deeply for Paul might be summarized like this: *Sincere people not trusting Christ go to hell.* Even if people in our lives are deeply sincere, a joy to be around, care for others and are people of principle and yet are sincerely wrong . . . God does not change his mind over how He saves people. Everyone needs to be rescued. Nobody can rescue themselves. Everyone needs salvation. Nobody, no matter how generous and kind and sacrificial and sincere can deliver themselves from the just penalty of sin. Salvation is not a thing. It is not a creed. It is not a lifestyle. It is not found in resolution. Even if a person is so enthusiastic over helping people, if they are not in Christ by faith they are not saved. They are under the wrath of God. They are deeply and eternally in danger. This truth moves the heart of Paul. This truth also is to move our hearts as we look at particular people in our lives with this perspective. As we interpret people through this lens our hearts are stirred for their salvation. We will find ourselves praying more fervently and frequently for the salvation of unbelievers.

Press this truth on your heart.

## Truth #2

## v4

The second truth that matters deeply for Paul causing him to pray deeply for salvation for unbelievers is found in v4. It reads: Fr Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. This truth that deeply matters for Paul might be summarized like this: *Since Jesus has done it all anyone may be saved if they simply believe in Him.* Verse 4 gives us hope that stirs our hearts to pray for salvation of unbelievers. The law is fulfilled. The law is now irrelevant with respect to salvation. People are freed from legalistic moralism. They do not under the expectation that they must reach a certain standard to be welcomed by God. They do not have to have an impressive track record or performance rating to have a clear conscience and joy of salvation. Jesus is the fulfillment and termination of the law. It’s over. The rule-keeping, standard-striving, calendar-watching lifestyle has been done away with in Christ. This means that your unbelieving friend or spouse or parent or child can let law-keeping for acceptance go. And simply rest in Christ’s work on the cross and simply relish Jesus as their lover. This is the good news of great joy in Jesus. This truth is to deeply matter to us. As we believe this truth as it relates to unbelievers our heart desire for them to be saved will yield a heart-felt prayer for them.

These truths mattered deeply to Paul—truths like: sincere people not trusting Christ go to hell. And, because Jesus has done it all anyone may be saved if they simply believe in Him.

He allowed these truths to touch and break and energize his heart. Why does he pray for salvation for the lost? Truth matters. Truth is personal. Truth tells it like it is. And there is urgency and there is hope as we pray for others that the gospel will convert the lost and make them children of the King.

Press these truths on your heart.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion here are a few questions for reflection.

1. Are you someone who seeks to get right with God on your own terms and in your own way?
  - a. Help them see this as their own salvation
2. Do you know someone who seeks God's favor sincerely yet is ignorant of the gospel?
  - a. Help them see this as urgency for praying
3. Are you convinced that the whole Bible points to and terminates in Jesus Christ. Salvation is personal and not abstract. He is revealed as Jesus the Christ the Son of God.
  - a. Help them see this as hope for praying

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