

ROMANS 9:1-5

SALVATION IS FROM . . .

Paul begins this section by emphasizing that what he's about to say is truthful. He even brings the Holy Spirit in as a witness. You'd need the Holy Spirit to make and back up such a claim as Paul is about to make. I don't think I could make such a claim. Could you? Plainly said, Paul is saying that he's willing to go to hell if that could bring salvation to his fellow Jews. I don't think I could say that. Could you tell someone that you were willing to give up your salvation so that they could have salvation?

It's only by the power of the Holy Spirit that Paul makes such a claim, but I don't think that I'd want to make such a claim. Paul continues by saying that he's in great sorrow and unceasing anguish over this situation that his fellow Jews have rejected Jesus. Paul is expressing great love for his people, the people of God, the people of Israel, the people out of whom he has come. These five verses make up an incredible expression of love.

Is there someone in your life whom you love so much that you'd be willing to die for them, or even go to hell for them so that they could live now and eternally in heaven with Jesus? We may casually say such things, but do we really mean it?

That's why Paul begins by emphasizing that he's not lying. He's about to speak the truth, and as we might say, "As God as my witness", he says, "the Holy Spirit as my witness", and that's really the more appropriate phrase here because it's only by the power of the Holy Spirit that anyone could say something like this.

Self-sacrifice. Willing eternal sacrifice. Do you think any of us could love our enemies as Paul does. And that's the correct word here: "Enemies!". It starts out all warm and fuzzy as Paul says, "Brothers", and "Kinsmen", but then he adds according to the flesh. He descended ancestrally from the Jews, but he wasn't a brother or kinsmen with the Jews anymore. He was their enemy. That wasn't by his choice. He didn't become their enemy, but they became his enemy. And yet he's still willing to die eternally for them so that they might be saved.

To put this in perspective we need to see what type of enemy the Jews were towards Paul. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians he writes, "Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned" (11:24-25a). These are the sorts of things that the Jews did to Paul, and Paul still cared so deeply for them that he was willing to go to hell for them.

These people were trying to kill Paul, and yet Paul expresses great love for them. Meanwhile we struggle to love and forgive those who are unkind towards us. 'That salesclerk was rude to me, I'm not shopping there anymore. I'm not talking to that person, that family member anymore because of how they treated me. I'm not attending that church anymore because some people, the pastor was unfriendly towards me.' Those are the kinds of things we say, while Paul says, 'Those people are trying to kill me. Well, if I could die for their salvation, even die eternally I'm willing to do that. It's hard to imagine that kind of love when I listen to the people of this community and their critical, judgmental, condemning nature towards one another.'

Here Paul is putting himself forward as an image of the love that Jesus has for us. Of course, Paul couldn't die and go to hell so that the Jews could be saved. Jesus already did that for the Jews and all people. Jesus died on the cross bearing the sins and punishment for the entire world of all time. Jesus was forsaken by God the Father and experienced the full wrath of God for all of us. And Jesus did go to hell, not to suffer further punishment, but rather to declare victory over Satan for us.

As Jesus walked towards His crucifixion He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!" (Matthew 23:37). When a hen gathers her brood under her wings it is often for the protection of that brood, it's often at the risk of the hen's life. The hen protects her brood from a hawk or from fire. Jesus wanted to gather His brood, His flock, His children of Israel under His wings to protect and save them from sin, death and the devil, but they were not willing. They killed and stoned the prophets sent to them, just as they killed Jesus and stoned Paul.

Paul's expression of being willing to suffer hell eternally for his fellow Jews is amazing. That Jesus suffered for all of humanity is even more amazing. He suffered for His fellow kinsmen and for the whole human race on that cross.

Without Jesus and His death on the cross for you, you don't have salvation. That grieves Paul. Does it grieve you when you look around at the people in our town? Do you hope and pray that they'll be saved? Do you care?

Paul lists all sorts of benefits that the Jews had, but they still didn't have salvation. They were adopted by God as His children. They saw the glory of God on Mount Sinai and in the Temple. They were given all sorts of covenants in the Old Testament. God struck a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15:17, 18), with Moses (Exodus 19:5, 6), with David (2 Samuel 7:8-16), through Jeremiah (31-31-40), and through the prophet Ezekiel (34:25-31), but they broke them all. They broke the law of the Ten Commandments. They had

worship practices to receive God's blessings, but they turned them into laws to be obeyed. They had promises from God, but didn't trust in them. They had so many more blessings from God than we do today, and yet they still walked away and rejected Jesus as their Saviour.

People have churches within walking distance of them in this community, but they don't attend. Do they know what goes on inside a Christian Church? Do you have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in your heart for them? This text isn't telling us that we need to be willing to die for the salvation of our neighbours. We can't do that. What it's doing is giving us a glimpse of the great love God has for all of us, including our neighbours, and we can share that great love with them by telling them about Jesus.

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). That's what Jesus did for us. He came down from His kingdom and lay down His life for His friends and enemies. While His people rejected and crucified Him, while He was bearing the sins of the world, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Don't think of this in some kind of idyllic way that Jesus died for those enemies over there, those bad people. We were also God's enemies at one point. Paul said that "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Romans 5:10).

Do you have a hard time hearing our text? Do you have a hard time asking God to forgive people who are doing you wrong? Dwell on Jesus' words from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". Dwell on the words that Stephen said while he was being stoned by the Jews: "falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."" (Acts 7:59-60).

This kind of love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit that God puts into all our hearts. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23a). We're compelled by these fruits of the Spirit to grow more loving, more generous and more caring. God's love forgives and saves us, and changes us to love others more. As Paul said to the Corinthians – "the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that [this] One has died for all" (2 Cor. 5:14).

Jesus died for all people – for us, for our neighbours, and for the Jews. And we can thank God for the Jews and for the Old Testament that they passed down to us with all of God's laws pointing to Jesus our Saviour. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews", and Jesus is from the Jews (John 4:22). Amen.