

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power for Salvation
TITLE: Paul's TED Talk

SCRIPTURE: Romans 9:1-5

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The book of Romans is a masterfully written exposition of the gospel of God. Without a doubt, it is the foundation of authentic Christianity and the most articulate, systematic understanding of our faith found in the Bible. Countless lives have been changed by the truth found in this ancient letter, and it continues to change lives today. Interestingly enough, Romans was written to Christians. So, while the good news found in Romans can certainly bring people to faith in Jesus, the actual focus is on how the gospel helps Christians think rightly about God, life, faith, and Christian community. If you want to grow to know God more personal and intimate way, this letter is for you!

Most people appreciate a good TED talk online. TED talks are 10-15 minute speeches about different ideas, culture, art, music, business, etc. And most of these talks begin with a quick introduction to get your attention, and then take you on a journey of seeing something important in a new and fresh way. Most TED talks include some shocking simplicity that is supposed to change the way you think about the world. And Romans 9-11 is Paul's TED talk.

Romans 9-11 is a single, unified stretch of Scripture that, if read out loud, takes about 10-15 minutes. And Paul's intro to this passage is an attention-grabbing emotional punch that starts the theological wheels turning, considering an old idea in a new way. While parts of these chapters have been counted among the most difficult in the New Testament, Paul's message is simple - the sovereign God is wise and faithful to his promises to ancient Israel. This is his simple message that he communicates in a somewhat shocking way.

But how does he start this talk? How does he grab our attention? Paul begins by saying that he has "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" (9:2) in his heart because of his Jewish brothers and sisters who don't know Jesus as their Messiah. This language should catch us off-guard. We don't often talk like this. We don't often talk about things that cause us constant anguish. And the thing that does it for Paul is that there are people who don't know Jesus.

Yes, Christians are called to joy and to hope. Yes, we're called to peace and to rest, but we're also called to long for others to come to know Jesus. Put simply, Passion for God includes a passion for others to know him.

Not only does Paul talk about this idea at the beginning of Romans 9, but also at the beginning of Romans 10: "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved" (10:1). This means that we should share this same heart posture. We should earnestly desire others to come to know Christ and have a personal relationship with him.

Another powerful picture of someone whose heart was burdened for people to come to Jesus was 19th-century British pastor Charles Spurgeon. He wrote,

"I remember, when I have preached at different times in the country, and sometimes here, that my whole soul has agonized over people – every nerve of my body has been strained, and I could have wept my very being out of my eyes, and carried my whole frame away in a flood of tears, if I could but win souls."

Spurgeon shared Paul's burden of wanting others to know God through Christ, and so should we. But Paul's specific burden was for his fellow Jews to know Jesus, and this takes us back to the big picture of Romans 9-11.

Paul wanted the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome to share this desire with him. Paul knew that racial, personal, and even theological unity can be achieved by having a shared sense of burden and mission for the world. And this mission, on one level, wouldn't fail. Why? Because God is faithful, even in spite of Israel's unbelief. God's faithfulness is the big idea of Paul's TED talk.

But how does Paul's emotionally-laden intro relate to the big picture of God's faithfulness that he'll continue to unfold for a few chapters? Well, our faithfulness to share the love of God with others is part of how God himself is faithful. He has commissioned us for this task. And even if we can't trace the precision of God's faithfulness, he's still faithful, and we're still called to faithfully respond to him.

For Discussion —

1. In what ways has God been surprisingly faithful in your life?
2. In what ways has God been surprisingly faithful in the Bible?
3. Who are two or three people you know who don't have a relationship with God because of Jesus? Commit to pray for them this week.
4. Personally, what part of this message stood out to you the most?
5. Who is someone you know whose heart is hopefully burdened with a desire to see other people know Jesus? What can you learn from them?
6. How is God's own faithfulness an example of how we should be faithful to him?