It Matters What You Believe

Romans 10:1-4

March 28th, 2010

Scripture

"Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. (Paul is praying for people who are not saved, who have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.) For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

The first Sunday in May of 1983, I became the pastor of Hardin Baptist Church. I cannot tell you what a joy it has been to be here all these years. It was a big move for us coming from Dexter, KY to Hardin, KY! But we made that journey daily as we began to minister to folks in Hardin. We spent the first several months just meeting and listening to people. Soon, it became evident to us that the people of this church, though it was small, had a heart for God and a heart for people who did not know Christ. It became evident that many families in this church had family members who did not know Christ and they were praying for them. I’ll never forget that in October of 1983 I wrote down in my journal the names of three men.
that I believe God laid on my heart. I made a commitment that I would pray for them. I really wanted them to be saved. I knew these men a little, but I would get to know them more. I could hear the heartbeat of a wife, of a daughter, and a mother; they really wanted these men to be saved. Because they wanted them to be saved, I wanted them to be saved too, and I believe with all of my heart that God wanted them to be saved. Twenty-seven years later, two of those men have come to know Christ.

I’ll never forget writing down the name of a state trooper who I wanted to see come to Christ and I began to pray for him. He actually pulled my wife over and gave her a ticket, and I still prayed for him! I cannot tell you what a joy it was one Sunday morning while all heads were bowed and this man slipped out of his pew and came forward to be saved. I was rejoicing inside as he got saved. When the service was over, I couldn’t understand why everyone wasn’t as excited as I was. Then I realized that no one else knew who came forward. This man now teaches Sunday school at Hardin Baptist Church.

The second man I wrote down was a carpenter. I will never forget when my wife and I and another church member went to his house and he literally ran us out of his house. He said, “Do you know the door you came in?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Hit it.” My wife and friend hit it and I tried to repair the damage and bow out gracefully. When we built our house, it was a thrill to hire him, a lost man, because we wanted him to be saved. He didn’t get saved while he was working on our house, but I’ll never forget the day another man called me to let me know that he had gotten saved and he wanted me to know that he had finally accepted Christ.

**Human Side of Salvation**

The third man is still on my list. I am still praying for him. I know and understand what the Apostle Paul meant when he said, “*My heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.*” Sometimes people will ask me why I pray, do missions, or evangelize if I believe what I do about Romans 9 and God being sovereign in salvation. I pray for the same
reason Paul prayed. Boy, are we in for a heck of a ride in chapter 10. After Paul clearly taught the divine side of salvation, Paul now dives into the human side of salvation. Based on everything he believes about God being sovereign over the affairs of men’s lives, the first thing Paul tells us when he talks about Israel’s unbelief is that he is on his knees in prayer to God for them. He doesn’t whine or go into a theological argument. The doctrine of unconditional election didn’t drive Paul to despair; it drove him to his knees because he knows that salvation is of God. Please hear me, the divine side of salvation never negates, minimizes, or trivializes the human side of salvation.

As we investigate chapter 10, we will come to understand completely and fully how both the divine and human side of salvation fully complement one another. We will come to understand that the reason people do not believe is because they do not want to believe. They have a real, meaningful, choice in their salvation. We will also come to understand that people who have a choice will never choose Christ until they hear the gospel. God has not ordained that people hear the gospel by way of angels, but by way of Christians who understand them and used to be in the very place they are in now. Paul tells us that as a person who used to be on the other side of the fence and was under Law and not grace, his heart takes pleasure in the salvation of his Jewish kinfolk (according to the flesh). He tells us that he prays for them because he believes in a divine side of salvation. He knew the divine side doesn’t mean that salvation is a two headed coin and is rigged. But neither did he believe that salvation is a two tailed coin and man is on his own and in a dilemma that he can’t get out of. Paul fully believed in a divine and human side of salvation, and because of that, it led him to pray.

- **Pray for the Salvation of Others**

As he wrote to Timothy, he told him to pray for all people because 1 Timothy 2:4 tells us that God “desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.” Paul would balance that out in 2 Timothy 2:10
by saying that he endures “everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” Peter said in 2 Peter 3:9 that God is patient with people because He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” I ask you, do you take pleasure in the salvation of others? Are you sincerely praying for people you know to be saved, or are you just giving lip service to the thought? Does your belief in God drive you to your knees on the behalf of others?

Zealous for God

Why was Paul such a prayerful ally of the unbelieving Jew? Verse 2 says, “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God...” In Galatians 1:14, Philippians 3:9, and Acts 22:3, Paul spoke about his pre-Christ days when he was under the Law as a Pharisee and being raised in Judaism at the feet of Gamaliel, the respected teacher of Israel in his day. He was zealous for God. He was so zealous for God that he tried to wipe out the early Church because he thought they were a heretical branch of Judaism. He tried to snuff them out.

- Without Knowledge

The word, “zeal”, means ‘to be fervent.’ It literally means to be hot. We have a phrase; ‘on fire.’ This phrase means to be on fire for God. Get this picture, Paul was praying for people who were lost, yet he knew were on fire for God. Whoa! He is praying for church going people. He is praying for people who went to the synagogue every Saturday. He is praying for people who were morally trying to keep the Ten Commandments. He is praying for people who thought they were good people! How many of those people are you praying for? If we aren’t careful, that isn’t who we are praying for. We are praying for that drug dealer, that addict, or the one who doesn’t go to church with his wife. We recognize those people need prayer, but do we recognize that the zealous also need prayer? I am talking about those people who are zealous, “but not according to knowledge.” Isn’t that one of the saddest statements you can say about a
group of people: “I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”

The normal word for “knowledge” in the Greek New Testament is *gnosis*. But the word for “knowledge” here is *epignosis*. It has a preposition at the beginning of it that intensifies the knowledge. Paul is saying that they have a zeal, they are on fire for God, but it is misdirected. It isn’t according to truth, it isn’t based on revelation; it is based on wrong thinking. Do you realize how dangerous that is? We live in a society where we believe that people who are zealous for God will be let into Heaven because they are sincere, enthusiastic, and committed to what they believe; no matter what they believe, even if they are misdirected.

**It Matter What You Believe**

I don’t like to title messages because I’m not good at it. I like to think I am pretty good at sermons though. When I was in Bible college, my best friend was great at titles but wasn’t very good at sermons. So I would write the sermons and he would title them. He would preach his title with my sermon and I would preach my sermon with his title. It worked out really neat and we got through Bible college doing that! But I believe this title really fits the message in this lesson: *It Matters What You Believe*. It breaks my heart to tell you this, but I have to tell you the truth. You have neighbors, family members, and friends who will sit in churches that have the name of God or Christ on the door and they are sincere; but they are sincerely wrong in what they believe. They are just like the Jews. It will make some of you mad, but I believe with all of my heart that there are people around the world who will gather in the name of God who are sincere, but they are sincerely wrong. No matter how they feel, or how close they think they are getting to the pursuit of God, they are not getting closer; they are getting farther and farther away from the truth. There comes a point in that person’s life where they are so wrong in their thinking, yet they so believe what they do, that the road they are on is very difficult to get off of, and it will not take them where they think it will.
**Why Pray?**

Paul prayed for them, but why did he pray for them? It was because he used to be one of them. He remembered when he was blind. He remembered when he was spiritually dead. And he, just like they, thought he was right with God and was doing godly things! He knew it took God breaking into his life, regenerating him, and ultimately opening his eyes to the truth of the gospel. That is why Paul prayed; because there is a divine side of salvation and it’s the only hope for those who are lost. He prayed because he believed in the human side of salvation; that God answers the prayers of people who are saved. Paul wasn’t just methodically going through a meditation exercise to take up time in his day! He was not doing something to be religious. He was appealing to the source of salvation, and that is God!

You don’t ever have to ask me why I pray. I pray because I believe God is the only one who can save sinners. If you don’t believe that, then I ask you, why do you pray? Some of us argue for a God who only makes salvation available to all, and doesn’t want Him to do anything to influence a person. Then I ask you, why do you pray? If all our God has done is put Jesus on a cross and offer Him to the world, then there is no need to pray because God has done all He can do and you don’t have a reason in the world to pray. You just have to thank God that He has done all He can do. Now you need to get busy trying to convince you friends to see what God has already done.

But you pray, and you pray because you believe God is the only one who can step into their life and open their eyes to the truth of who Jesus Christ is, and you ask Him to do what only He can do. Some of you have prayed prayers where you’ve asked God to make your lost husband miserable until he comes to Christ! Isn’t that violating His will? You see, we pray so that people will be saved! We take pleasure in that because we serve a God who wants people to be saved.
But Paul knew that he was praying for people who are ignorant; sincere, but without knowledge. The word “ignorant” here does not mean mental capability; it means moral content. They don’t have right information, and without right information they can never come to Christ. Sincerity will lead a lot of people straight to Hell.

I remember a story I read about a deer hunter who was preparing for opening day of gun season. He was cleaning his gun because it had been put up for almost a year. He fully believed it was unloaded and all of a sudden the Hartford Insurance commercial came on. It has that big animal in it, and when it came across the screen he picked up his unloaded gun and pointed it and pulled the trigger. When he pulled the trigger...BOOM! He got him, but he lost his TV in the process!

We have a lot of people today who are that zealous, but they are wrong. I will never forget as a young minister when my New Testament professor at Mid-Continent Bible College told a story. He was a connoisseur of political cartoons and he subscribed to every paper imaginable just to read the cartoon section. He said, “I was sitting on my porch reading my paper. I was reading one of my political cartoons when all of a sudden there were two young men who appeared on my porch. They began to pass out their literature to me; they were from a cult. They didn’t know who I was, but in about 15 minutes I had dismantled every thought they had. I had taken the Word of God and chewed them up and spit them out. They were now off of my porch getting ready to leave. I was feeling really satisfied when one of them turned around and said to me, ‘Sir, if you know you are right and we are wrong, then tell me why you are sitting on your porch and not doing what we are doing?’” On one side of that equation, there were people who were very zealous without knowledge. But on the other side of that equation, there was someone with truth but no zeal. Where are you at?

We have a word in English society that I just discovered the entomology of a few weeks ago. Have you ever called someone a chauvinist? If I
understand correctly, that word is used to describe someone who has misdirected zeal. They don’t realize that times have changed. They don’t realize the situation is not what it used to be. So we call those people chauvinistic. This came from when Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo by the forces of Wellington. He had a soldier who wasn’t there the day of that battle, so when Napoleon was defeated he didn’t know it. So for days and weeks afterward, he kept fighting for Napoleon. He was so zealous for Napoleon and he so believed in his ways that he kept fighting even though he had been defeated. So when he finally learned that Napoleon had been defeated, he refused to believe it for weeks! That soldier’s name was Chauvin. Today, anyone who has misdirected zeal is called a chauvinist! How sad it is for people to have a zeal for God and yet be misdirected.

### Establishing Your Own Righteousness

In verse 3 Paul said, “For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.” We have talked about a God kind of righteousness. Can you imagine a people who descended from Abraham, had the Rabbis and Scribes as teachers, the Law, the Patriarchs, the Covenant, the adoption, the Shekinah glory cloud, and all of the prophesies of the Old Testament, and yet they are ignorant of the only way a sinner can be made right with a holy God? So when you don’t have that piece of the puzzle, you do the only thing you know to do. That is to undo what is not right with you, and do the best you can do to get it together. You do everything you think you should do to please God, who is holy, holy, holy. So they took His Law, and instead of realizing this reveals the character of God and that they should be like Him, they decided that by keeping parts of the Law they could actually earn a right relationship with Him.

Now I know this will make people mad, but I cannot help it; it is the Word of God. Any attempt at bringing what you do, or have done, before God is an attempt to establish your own righteousness and declare to God, “I’m not that bad.” As a matter of fact, some of us fall prey to that. We have a
brand of righteousness where we look at others who do not know Christ and have made this comment, “They aren’t that bad.” You have said it yourself. You will never find God declaring that a sinner is not that bad in Scripture. You will always hear God declaring he is not that good. Because he is not that good, God put His Son on a tree because He desires the salvation of all men. After 33 years living on earth, Jesus completely fulfilled the Law, keeping every jot and tittle. He went to a tree and hung voluntarily. It wasn’t nails that held Him there; it was His love for His Father and His love for you. God took every sin that we, and all who has or ever will walk on this earth, have committed and placed it on Jesus. I have to believe that for an instant, God didn’t see Jesus; He saw us and poured His wrath out on our sin. Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?” The sun that God created refused to shine on Jerusalem that day when it saw what the sin of man did to the Son of God. He died so that His righteousness could be placed into your account.

**Jesus Is the Only Way**

Jesus never declared that He was a truth, or a life, or a way. He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” In the religious world, we believe most people are ok and that is why we don’t pray. Let’s be honest, who are you really concerned about at this very moment that isn’t saved? How concerned are you? How much time out of your day are you spending in prayer just for that person? How many times have you taken time out of your schedule to personally witness to the people that you are praying for? Most of us believe that most people are ok, but not Paul.

I have heard people say, “I don’t go to a church that believes what you believe, but I go to church and we’re all trying to get to the same place. We’re just not all going the same way.” If I understand Scripture right, there is only one way to God. It isn’t curvy and it isn’t long; it is straight and it’s narrow. Jesus is not a way, He is the way! He is the only way. The only people who are in a right relationship with God are those who have
turned from a self-kind of righteousness, abandoning a lifestyle of believing salvation is in anything they do, and they are totally committed to what Jesus did on a cross for them for their sin. That is the only way. If you are on any other road or have a friend on any other road, they are not on a road that will eventually get them to Jesus; they are on a road to Hell! It’s why we pray, and it is also why we evangelize.

**Presentation of the Gospel**

Don’t ever ask a person who believes in the grace of God for salvation why he prays, witnesses, or goes on missions. He knows there is a divine side of salvation, but there is also a human side of salvation. On the human side of salvation, no one will ever believe in Jesus Christ until they hear a proper presentation of Jesus Christ. The Bible says that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Paul teaches that salvation is not far away; it is as close as your mouth and your heart. If with your mouth you confess that Jesus is Lord and with your heart you believe in His death, burial, and resurrection, you will be saved! No believer will ever be put to shame. No believer will ever be cast aside by God. He welcomes with open arms all sinners who believe in His Son! But we know that a person will never call upon the name of the Lord if they don’t believe, and they cannot believe unless they hear. They cannot hear unless someone is sent. When that person is sent to you with the good news of the gospel, it is as if they have beautiful feet.

**Object of Your Faith**

It matters what you believe. You aren’t saved by faith...having faith does not save you. There are a lot of people that have faith. It is the object of your faith. Salvation, like mathematics, is a precise thing. You don’t get credit in math unless you get it right, because two plus two is always four; it is never five. Five is close to four, but it is still wrong. Salvation is precise; there is no other name under Heaven whereby men must be saved than the name Jesus Christ. As uncomfortable as this is from a humanistic perspective, it is why we must be faithful to pray and present the true
gospel to people. Never look down your nose at someone who is still in sin. Remember where you were, not just where you are. If you will remember that, you will better understand why some people are still where they are! That is why we pray. That is why our heart takes pleasure, not in God making a sinner pay, but being graceful and merciful to a sinner, just as He was to us.

**Christ Ended the Law**

Verse 4 says, “Christ is the end of the Law for everyone who believes.” Paul is teaching that the Law was never meant to bring people to salvation. It was meant to hold people in school, so to speak, until the Messiah came. When He came, we were to put our faith and trust in Him. Repent of your self-righteousness and trust in the provision of God in Christ for your salvation. He will welcome you with open arms into His family. He will completely wipe you clean and give you a brand new start. This is for “whosoever will.” Believe in His Son Jesus Christ. Don’t hide behind a doctrine that says salvation is rigged and you don’t have an opportunity to be saved. If you don’t get saved, it is your fault. On the Day of Judgment, every thought you have will be laid bare and you will say before the universe that the reason you didn’t get saved was because you didn’t want to get on the Jesus road and you didn’t want to be saved. Turn from a lifestyle of sin and make Jesus your Lord and He will save you. He will regenerate you and your life will change before the eyes of everyone. God saves those who call upon His name for salvation.