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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
August 23, 2020  
12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: I Kings 9:9-18; Matthew 14:22-33

Hymns: 296; 381; 294; 283

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Romans 9:1-5

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, <sup>2</sup>that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. <sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of *God*, and the promises; <sup>5</sup>of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Burden

Burden is not a word to be used lightly, especially if we are implying that we are receiving a burden from the Lord. I imagine that for most of us the word has negative connotations. We may have many burdens in this life that are unpleasant, some of which we may have brought upon ourselves. When people have a severe handicap, or a disease that brings with it chronic and at times

severe pain, that may indeed be a burden from which one would pray to be delivered.

At other times one may speak of a burden of responsibility. There are times when God entrusts individuals with a great responsibility in their lives on a personal or a professional level. Raising children is a fine example. It is a burden, but one which we embrace. Many parents, most parents will say that this brought a special purpose and meaning to their lives they had not previously known. It's a blessing!

Being a child of God, one who believes in Jesus as our Redeemer and Lord, this is what changes the whole understanding of burden. You see the greatest of our burdens was the burden of guilt and death that came into the world because of sin. This burden would crush anyone to despair. But Jesus came into the world and in His grace, by means of His great sacrifice upon the cross lifted that burden from us forever. We know His gracious invitation: "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*"<sup>29</sup> *Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*"<sup>30</sup> *For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*" (Matthew 11:28-30)

Faith in Jesus brings its own burden but, like childrearing, it is to be a burden we carry with joy in our hearts to the Lord. We will willingly take up our cross (which is suffering for Jesus' name) and follow Him. And we will realize that the Lord has blessed us with a special purpose and responsibility of sharing the good news of life and salvation with others in this world. That always begins with those around us, those whom the Lord has brought into our lives, those who are close to our hearts.

The Spirit would instruct us from the Apostle Paul's example concerning --

## **THEME: The Christian's Burden for Lost Souls.**

It begins with a --

### **I. Concern for the Spiritual Welfare of Others.**

Our text reveals the depth of Paul's concern for his fellow Jews.

**Romans 9:1-3** “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, <sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,”

Paul’s passion for souls is evident in these words, but what is especially apparent is Paul’s attachment, his love of his fellow Jews. It was crushing for Paul that the vast majority of his fellow countrymen despised the gospel of Christ, and rejected the grace and forgiveness freely offered through faith in Christ Jesus. We need to remember where Paul started; he was not only Saul the Pharisee, but that he had taken a leadership role in persecuting believers in Jesus with the intent of destroying this movement, this faith.

But then the Lord Jesus intervened. As Paul was approaching Damascus where he was intending to arrest Christians and haul them back to Jerusalem for trial and possible execution, the Lord Jesus appeared to him. Jesus challenged him, and called him not only to faith, but also to be a messenger of the gospel to the gentiles. Faith not only opened Paul’s eyes to how terribly wrong he had been, but also to fate of his fellow Jews if they didn’t repent and believe the gospel. Paul knew it was a fate worse than death. Paul knew to the very core of his being that these people, many within this nation which he so dearly loved would be lost forever in hell! He cared so deeply that in these opening words of our text Paul declares his own willingness to be lost forever if that would save his fellow Jews.

In expressing the depth of his loving concern Paul revealed the burden that weighed upon his heart for other souls, lost souls. He knew his condemnation couldn’t save any others. He knew that Christ had already paid the price with His sacrifice upon the cross. This is purely an expression of the depth of loving concern, the burden Paul carried for the souls of a people he loved.

In this way Paul was imitating Christ. “Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us an offering and sacrifice to God!” (Ephesians 5:2) We love because Jesus loved us. (1 John 4:9) This love which

drove Jesus to the cross takes hold of our hearts. It possesses our hearts just as it possessed Paul's heart. Paul directed this special expression of a burden for souls to the Jewish people, his fellow countrymen. That correlates with the mission theme of this epistle to the Romans, that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Romans 1:16) Without doubt we see God's desire for the salvation of the Jewish people expressed in Paul's words.

Now what about us and the burden for lost souls? I would find it rather odd if each of us didn't have a special love for our fellow Americans even as Paul did for his fellow countrymen. This is where the Lord has placed us in this world, and we have been richly blessed to be living in a country with the liberty and justice, and opportunities that we have in America. Simply being an American doesn't bring salvation, by no means! In deed characterizing America as a Christian country doesn't make it a country of Christians. Many of the people that surround us in daily life, people we greet on the street, or work with, or socialize with don't know the truth of the gospel. While everybody has heard Jesus name, it is heard far more often as a swear word than a word of worship or praise. That alone tells the story of where our fellow Americans are spiritually.

As Christians who know about sin and death, as well as about grace and forgiveness and life in Jesus' name, the spiritual state of our fellow Americans should bother us a great deal. Like Paul, we should possess that same kind of love that Christ Jesus has for us; we should have that burden for those around us. This is our Christ-given burden, and it is light. You know the refrain from the old song, "*He ain't heavy; he's my brother.*" Care for souls is why we're here on this earth. It's what we're to be about.

Look at the spiritual advantages we have in America! Look at what we are free to do with the gospel! May we learn a greater --

## **II. Appreciation for the Means of Grace.**

The Apostle Paul took note of all the spiritual blessings, one might say advantages, that the people of the Jews had going for them. The Jews were the "Israelites (of old), to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the

service of *God*, and the promises, of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, *Christ came*.”

These were the people that God had chosen as His own special people, the descendants of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! They had been delivered from Egypt by the mighty hand of God. They had witnessed His power and His glory. The Lord had entrusted to them the Law at Sinai, not only the Ten commandments, but all the ceremonial law and the temple worship that directed their attention forward to the coming of the promised Savior. They had seen the glory of the Lord at Sinai, they saw it again and again in their history, including at the dedication of the temple. They had the Scriptures delivered to them, the books of Moses, the writings of the prophets, the book of Psalms. In these Scriptures God’s Covenant of salvation was laid out for them that they might watch for the Messiah’s appearing. Finally, Paul points out that it was this people through whom the Christ was born into the world!

Grace! So much grace was given this people! So much grace was squandered and lost!

Now if that could happen with the Jews simply neglecting the truth of the gospel, it could happen as easily to other nations. Indeed it has. Time and again grace has been squandered, and the gospel has been lost to a nation.

Consider the spiritual state of our own homeland, the United States of America. What gracious blessings have come to us! We have God’s Word. The gospel has been presented in its truth and purity for generations in our land. We have enjoyed the liberty to worship the Lord and gather in His name without harassment, without fear. We all have Bibles in our homes. They are easy to come by. You can pick one up at any book store. You can even have your pick at Sam’s Club, or even buy one at Hobby Lobby. We have regular worship services on Sunday mornings, we have Bible classes and Sunday school and confirmation classes. We have magazines and on line streaming, CLC web sites. There are multiple opportunities to hear the gospel any time of day, any day of the week. The message is before you.

Add to that this grace; God has chosen us to be His own special people. He has redeemed us by the sufferings and death of Jesus, His only Son, our Lord. He has called us to faith, and delivered us from death and the devil. This is the grace that has come to our homeland, and yet the truth is slipping away as more and more churches compromise the gospel, and fewer and fewer people remain steadfast to the truth. So much grace taken for granted. So much grace squandered.

May we by the Spirit's power turn this around starting with our own lives that we would open our eyes to the advantages and blessings that the Lord has given us, and grow in our appreciation of His grace in our lives. The gospel is a rare thing and precious, and powerful.

Couple our first two points together. We have a burden for souls, and yes that extends to all people across the globe, but just as Paul felt that special burden for the Jews, may we also feel that burden for our relatives, for our neighbors, for our fellow countrymen. Now, tie that to the spiritual advantages we enjoy as Americans. We are in a blessed situation in which we can focus our spiritual energy on bringing the gospel, which is "*the power of God unto salvation,*" (Romans 1:16) to those around us.

To do this successfully we have to be found --

### **III. Trusting Jesus as Our Savior God.**

The closing words of our text might easily be skipped over, as if Paul is simply reminding us all that God should be blessed. These words emphasize a great truth that lies at the very heart of the gospel, a truth we all know, but still need to ponder. Of the Jews Paul says, "from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen!"

Immediately after stating that the Christ came from the people of the Jews, Paul went on to teach us that Christ is God! Jesus is the **eternal** God. And the "Amen" -- that is the same as Luther's "**This is most certainly true!**"

OK, so what to ponder? The mystery of true God and true man in one person. Sure, but there's more than that. The eternal God in the

greatness of His love for us took upon Himself our flesh and blood. He became part of His creation for the purpose of saving a sinful and continuously rebellious mankind from their sin and the condemnation they deserve. He took the curse of sin in our place, and shed the blood of the Son of God; that is what makes Jesus' blood the holy precious blood that redeems us to God, and not us alone, but also the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

Faith lays hold of this Jesus. When doubts and accusations arise within our hearts or minds, it is not my good works or even my faith that reassures me, but looking to Jesus, and hearing Him say, *“Your sins are forgiven you!”*

This is Jesus, your Lord and your God, who brings freely to all that peace that passes all understanding, and keeps your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7) This is our burden, the light burden Jesus has entrusted to us, that we share this peace of Christ with our neighbor.

**AMEN.**

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)