

Amen: It Shall Be So

Romans 9:1-5

A father tells me he wishes his children would attend church . . . a grandmother laments that her grandchildren haven't been baptised . . . it plays on her mind . . . she worries about it. A wife prays for her husband every night, that he might join her in faith . . . a man expresses his concern over a friend who has left the church and hasn't been worshipping anywhere . . . a child wonders about all those children who haven't heard about Jesus . . . will *they* go to heaven? They are real concerns that lie heavy on people's hearts.

I doubt any of you would be strangers to those sort of concerns . . . perhaps you've been there . . . had those worries . . . about your children . . . or, grandchildren . . . or, friends, or neighbours. The concerns can lie heavy on *our* hearts, too.

Well, we're not alone . . . they lay heavy on the apostle Paul's heart too . . . concerns for his 'people' . . . his 'family' . . . the people of Israel . . . fellow Jews . . . so many of whom had not come to faith in Jesus. What was to become of them?

And, what's most striking about Paul's anguish is that it comes immediately after one of the most comforting and powerful confessions of faith . . . Paul has just finished reminding the Christians in Rome that 'nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus' . . . nothing! Talk about a spiritual high! But, then, in the very next sentence . . . the very next breath . . . he says: "[Yet], I have great sorrow and anguish in my heart". Not sorrow and anguish for himself, or about himself . . . no, God's promises are a great comfort for him . . . but, what about those he cares so much about . . . those who are rejecting Jesus . . . what about them?

That's the question, isn't it?

Has God rejected those people . . . will they enter the kingdom of God . . . because they have rejected him?"

This is not an abstract, or theoretical question for Paul . . . it's intensely personal . . . so much so that he would be willing to be cursed . . . that means cut off from God! . . . if it meant others would be able to experience the love of Jesus in their lives.

And, it's also often an intensely personal question for us . . . because we're talking about our children . . . our grandchildren . . . our friends . . . people we care about . . . has God rejected them because they ignore God . . . and, if God *hasn't* rejected them, how can we know? Will they come to be in a relationship with him?

Well, as we wrestle with this question, along with Paul, there are two false lines of thinking that will lead us astray. The first is this . . . that we believe it's up to *us* to bring them into a relationship with Jesus . . . or, it's up to us to bring them *back* into a relationship with Jesus. There's a little bit of the serpent's whisper in that way of thinking . . . "Your children don't go to church anymore? God's obviously forgotten about them. So, you'd better try harder . . . you'd better preach better sermons . . . you'd better pray harder . . . you'd better evangelise more. It's a subtle pull away from trusting God and his promises . . . his promises that his Word won't return to him empty . . . that he wants all people to come to faith . . . that Jesus, and Jesus alone saves!

What will happen to those who won't acknowledge God . . . especially our loved ones? Well, our first response to that question should be not to look at ourselves, to trust . . . to trust God, not ourselves . . . it's up to God to save them, not us. But, can we trust God to do that?

Well, Paul himself goes through a checklist . . . his people are rejecting God . . . that's the bad news . . . that's the black mark on the ledger! But, then he looks at the plus side of the ledger . . . to them belong the adoption . . . the glory . . . the covenants . . . the law . . . the worship . . . the promise . . . the patriarchs . . . and, from them comes the Messiah . . . but . . . *but* . . . all this comes not from themselves . . . not because they are so good . . . so deserving . . . all of this is valuable to them only because of the one who gives it!

It's God who adopts. It's God who gives them his glory. It's God who establishes the covenants. It's God who gives the law. It's God who is the focus of worship. It's God who gives his promise. It's God who called the patriarchs. Obviously these people mean something to God!

It's God who sent his only Son – the Messiah. It's God who called Paul on the road to Damascus. It's God who calls *each* person by name and gives them a living relationship with him. It's God doing, and his alone, that nothing will separate us from him . . . and, just as Paul, in his anguish must place his people into God's hands . . . trusting that God's love in Jesus can overcome any obstacles . . . so, too, we must place all those we worry about into God's hands . . . trusting that his love can overcome all obstacles.

So, the first false line of thinking is that it's up to us to bring them back. But, the second false line of thinking is believing that it's not up to us to bring them back!

Did I just contradict myself?

Well, it's all about getting things in the right order. God does the calling . . . yes, God does the saving . . . but, God doesn't work by magic . . . he's not up in heaven brewing up a potion to make everyone believe in him . . . yes, God does the saving, but how does he do the saving? Through human means . . . through Jesus . . . a human being like us . . . forgiving . . . healing . . . feeding . . . loving . . . calling people to join him through the church which is his body on earth.

So, if God works through human means . . . through the church . . . that means *real* humans . . . not theoretical ones . . . real humans like the apostle Paul . . . who, trusting in God's provision and grace, never gave up speaking the saving word of Jesus to his own people and to the Gentiles. Paul's first stop wherever he went was always to the temple . . . there, he talked about Jesus . . . there he bore witness to the difference Jesus made in his life.

So, it is with real human beings like us . . . called by God . . . given God's grace . . . we don't do the saving but is that good enough reason *not* to tell others about Jesus? Not to bear witness to the one whose love redeems, sustains and shapes us? In our words, and in our actions, we share the love and hope that we have in Jesus . . . we take the opportunities however they come . . . we bring them before our heavenly Father in prayer . . . knowing . . . trusting . . . that nothing can separate any of us from the love of God in Christ Jesus . . . because he is Lord over all.

And, our trust is cemented by one word . . . as it was for the apostle Paul . . . a word that gives us hope in our witness . . . that word is: Amen . . . it shall be so.

Let's say it together . . . And all God's people said, "Amen".

It shall be so.

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