

REMNANT CHURCH SERMON NOTES – ROMANS 9: 2-4a
PREACHED ON AUGUST 9, 2026, BY REV. B.B. ANUM-HIGHER

2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, 4 the people of Israel.

➤ **INTRODUCTION**

- In almost every one of his letters, Paul opens his heart to his readers. He does not merely teach doctrine; he tells us something of his own inner life and deepest emotions. Young preachers are often advised, "Do not speak about yourself; speak about Christ." Certainly Christ must always be the center of our preaching, yet Paul frequently spoke of his own feelings when doing so helped the church understand the grace of God. He tells the Corinthians how he felt when God called him to preach the gospel in their great and influential city. The Lord had laid upon him the solemn responsibility of proclaiming Christ to all who would hear, and Paul does not hide his emotions. He writes, "I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling" (1 Corinthians 2:3).
- In effect he is saying, "I was afraid that I might fail to be faithful to the message God had entrusted to me. I feared wasting such a precious opportunity. I knew I might be intimidated by the opposition I would face. I was conscious of the indifference, hostility, and resistance around me, and I felt my own weakness." Paul tells them this so they would never imagine him to be a spiritual superman. He wanted them to know that he served Christ just as every believer must serve him—in humble dependence upon the Lord for strength, courage, wisdom, and grace.
- Paul also spoke openly about feelings far deeper than fear. He told the Corinthians of his grief and anguish. Writing to them he says, "For I wrote to you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears" (2 Corinthians 2:4). Serious sin had entered the congregation, and Paul knew that loving them required painful confrontation. Part of restoring the church was letting them see how deeply their condition affected him. Some believers were burdened with sorrow and imagined that such feelings were somehow unspiritual, as though Christians must always appear cheerful and triumphant. Paul corrects that misunderstanding by speaking honestly of his own experience. He knew great distress, deep anguish of heart, and many tears. The spiritual fall of fellow believers pierced him deeply. Their sin became his sorrow, and he was not ashamed to let them see the compassion and grief that filled his heart.
- Here in verse 2 of our text Paul tells the believers in Rome, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart." He does not conceal his emotions or keep them locked away. Instead, he allows the church to see the burden he carries within. There is something profoundly Christian about possessing deep affections

and being willing to share them with God's people. This openness is exactly what we find throughout the New Testament. When Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned to death, the believers carried him to his burial “and made great lamentation over him.” When Jesus stood before the tomb of Lazarus, he openly wept alongside the grieving sisters. Wherever our Lord encountered suffering, rejection, and the misery caused by sin, he was moved with compassion. He was not indifferent, nor merely irritated by human unbelief, but filled with profound pity and sorrow.

- When Jerusalem rejected him, refusing the salvation God had graciously sent, Jesus wept over the city. They would not come to him and find shelter beneath his wings, and they were rushing toward eternal judgment. Such realities broke the Savior's heart. A cold and indifferent spirit is inconsistent with genuine Christian faith. How can we seriously believe that there is a coming day when Christ will judge the world, and that many will hear those dreadful words, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels,” and yet remain unmoved? Surely the biblical response to the reality of hell is one of sorrow, compassion, and earnest concern. If there is no grief for the lost, do we truly believe what Christ himself has said? Scripture teaches us that godly affections matter. The Psalms themselves are filled with holy joy, sorrow, longing, repentance, and hope.
- One of the greatest dangers facing faithful biblical preachers is the temptation toward hyper-intellectualism. It is possible to preach in a way that informs the mind while leaving the heart untouched. A man may become so absorbed with doctrine that his ministry appeals almost exclusively to the intellect. The result is an impoverished congregation—well instructed perhaps, but emotionally, devotionally, and practically undernourished. Such ministers become men of books more than men of people. They understand theological systems, yet know little of the warm experiential reality of communion with the living God. It is one thing to explain the truths of Christianity accurately; it is another to have your own heart captivated by the beauty, majesty, and loveliness of Jesus Christ, and then to preach him with such sincerity and affection that the whole person is addressed—mind, heart, conscience, and will. True preaching does more than communicate information; by God's blessing it awakens love for Christ with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength. It leads people into the blessed experience our Lord described in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Those who are strangers to holy sorrow are often strangers to the warmth and tenderness of true Christian devotion as well.

➤ **PAUL GRIEVES AT THE JEWS' REJECTION OF THEIR MESSIAH.**

- Notice in verses 3-4, how Paul speaks of his fellow Jews. He does not call them “Jesus-haters” or “Christ-crucifiers.” Instead, he refers to them with tenderness as “my brothers, my own people according to the flesh, the people of Israel.”

Such language reveals the heart of the apostle. Though they had rejected Christ and opposed his ministry, Paul never ceased to love them. He looked upon them not with bitterness but with deep affection and sorrow. What was the message they had rejected? It was the very heart of the Christian faith. The Creator God had sent his own eternal Son into the world. Jesus lived the perfect life of obedience that we have all failed to live, fulfilling God's righteous law on behalf of his people. By God's eternal purpose he died as the Lamb of God, reconciling guilty sinners to a holy God through his sacrificial death. He stood in our place, bearing the judgment we deserved.

- Through his atoning death he satisfied the righteous wrath of God against sin for all those he came to save. On the third day he rose victorious over death, forty days later he ascended into heaven, and from there he will one day return to judge the living and the dead. Everyone who trusts in him will not perish but will receive everlasting life. That is the glorious good news concerning the person and saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- This was the message Paul preached because it was the message he had received from Christ himself and because it was the gospel proclaimed by all the apostles. It remains the foundation of every true gospel church. Wherever Paul travelled throughout the Mediterranean world, he entered the synagogues and showed the Jews from the Scriptures that the promised Seed of the woman had indeed come and had crushed the serpent's head just as God had promised in Eden. He proclaimed that the promised descendant of Abraham, through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed, had now appeared, and that through the spread of the gospel those blessings were reaching every nation. He declared that Isaiah's virgin-born suffering Servant had come to make atonement for sin, and that Daniel's glorious Son of Man, to whom everlasting dominion was given, was none other than Jesus Christ, now reigning with all authority in heaven and on earth. Paul set before them the life, teaching, miracles, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth with clarity, conviction, and passion.
- Yet the tragic reality was that the overwhelming majority of his fellow Jews refused to believe. They would not accept that Jesus was the promised Messiah. For nearly forty years after Christ's resurrection they persisted in unbelief until, in A.D. 70, Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed and many of the people were carried away into captivity. They dismissed Paul's preaching as falsehood. To them, Jesus had been a deceiver, and Paul was simply another deceiver following him. Their hostility became so fierce that they repeatedly sought to kill him. On one occasion, a group of Jews even bound themselves under a solemn oath not to eat or drink until they had murdered the apostle. Such was the opposition Paul endured from the very people he loved and longed to see brought to salvation.
- What more could the Lord Jesus have done to demonstrate that he was the promised Messiah? Which of the prophecies concerning the coming Christ did he

fail to fulfill? The nineteenth-century Oxford scholar Henry Liddon identified no fewer than 332 Old Testament prophecies that found their fulfillment in the life of Jesus. They spoke of his humble family background, his manner of life, his character, his teaching, and his mighty works. They even foretold the smallest details surrounding his suffering and death: that his disciples would forsake him, that he would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, that the money would be used to buy a potter's field, that false witnesses would accuse him, and that he would be mocked, beaten, and humiliated without retaliating. Scripture declared that he would be crucified between criminals, pray for those who executed him, have none of his bones broken, have his body pierced, and have soldiers cast lots for his garments. Every one of those prophecies was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

- Yet despite such overwhelming evidence, many of the Jews who rejected him responded to Paul's preaching with only one accusation: "Lies! Falsehoods!" Is that not remarkably similar to the world in which we live today? We proclaim the matchless life of the Lord Jesus Christ. We testify that he is God incarnate, the eternal Son who came to save sinners. Yet the world responds with skepticism. People ask, "If Christianity is true, why do so few people believe it? Why is church attendance so low? If the gospel is true, why doesn't everyone accept it?" Those are not new questions. They are the very questions Paul addresses in Romans. We ask him, "Paul, why has Israel, for the most part, rejected the Messiah whom God promised? Why have your own kinsmen according to the flesh refused to receive Jesus as their Redeemer? Why wasn't Jerusalem experiencing a sweeping revival in your day? Why did your preaching provoke hostility, persecution, and cries of 'Lies! Lies! Lies!' instead of widespread repentance? And why is it that the Gentiles, who for centuries were strangers to the covenants of promise, have responded to the gospel in far greater numbers than the very people who had been waiting for the Messiah's arrival?"
- The reason for Israel's rejection of Christ is not because the evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, is lacking. The New Testament presents an overwhelmingly compelling testimony to him. If any of you will read it with an honest desire to know the truth, I am persuaded that you will discover the truth concerning Jesus Christ. Neither do we explain unbelief by saying that everything is simply the result of God's sovereign decree, as though he delighted that multitudes should remain in their sins. No. We believe that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but desires that sinners should turn from their sin and believe in his Son. To that very end he sends his servants into all the world with the gospel, speaking through them as though he himself were pleading and beseeching men and women to be reconciled to him. Our responsibility is clear: obey your sovereign Lord and proclaim his gospel to every creature.
- How then should we respond to the widespread unbelief of our fellow students, neighbors, and countrymen? Paul's complete answer to that question occupies

the remainder of this chapter, but his first response to Israel's rejection of Christ is both indispensable and deeply moving. He does not answer with cold logic or detached theology. Instead, he quietly says, "I know..." You can almost see him bow his head. His voice falters. There is a heaviness in his heart. "Alas," he is saying, "it is painfully true that so few of my own family, my neighbors, and my fellow Israelites have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. It breaks my heart."

Then, with tears in his eyes, he confesses, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart." Such grief is the godly response to unbelief. It is the mark of genuine Christian faith—of a heart that has learned to love as Christ loved.

- Paul could also have reminded them that none of this had taken the Lord Jesus by surprise. Christ had already warned his disciples that they would be a little salt preserving a corrupt world and a small light shining in deep darkness. He had plainly said, "Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life."

➤ **INWARD FEELINGS OF ANGUISH DROVE PAUL TO EVANGELISM.**

- Of course, Paul did not simply grieve over the unbelief of his people—he labored tirelessly to reach them. Few men have ever worked as faithfully as he did. He was steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord. Although he was despised, opposed, and rejected by his own countrymen, he never allowed bitterness to take root in his heart. He did not become resentful or vindictive. Instead, he continued to love them, pray for them, and proclaim to them the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. Surely there is much for us to learn from his example. There is a striking incident in the Old Testament that illustrates this spirit. During one of Israel's darkest periods, the nation was suffering through a severe famine brought about by a devastating siege of Samaria by the Syrian army. Conditions inside the city had become desperate. Four lepers, shut out from normal society, reasoned together that they had nothing left to lose. If they remained in the city, they would certainly die of starvation. If they crossed the open ground to the enemy's camp, the Syrians might kill them—but they might also spare them and give them food. So they set out toward the camp, hoping only for mercy.
- To their astonishment they found the entire Syrian camp deserted. The Lord had caused the enemy to flee in panic, leaving everything behind. The tents were overflowing with food and drink, and there were riches beyond anything the lepers had imagined. They rushed from tent to tent, eating until they were satisfied, drinking freely, and hiding away silver, gold, and clothing for themselves. But after a time their consciences began to trouble them. One of them said to the others, "We are not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves... Let us go at once and report this to the royal palace" (2 Kings 7:9). So they returned and announced the wonderful news that deliverance had come.

- That account is a searching picture of many Christians today. We feast upon the riches of God's grace. We enjoy the promises of Scripture, the fellowship of God's people, and the faithful preaching of his Word. We rejoice in the blessings Christ has given us, yet too often we keep this treasure to ourselves. We have discovered the good news of salvation, but we fail to tell those around us who are still starving spiritually. Like those lepers, we must remember that a day of good news is not a day for silence. The gospel we have freely received is the gospel we are called to share.

➤ **PAUL LONGED FOR THE JEWS TO BE SAVED.**

- In our text we encounter one of the most astonishing statements Paul ever wrote: "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers" (v. 3). Paul looked upon his own people with intensity of love. He thought of the familiar scenes of Israel—the fishing boats upon the Sea of Galilee, Jerusalem crowning its hills, elderly neighbors talking together in the streets, children at play, families walking to the synagogue on the Sabbath, the psalms rising from their lips, and the familiar sounds of the Aramaic language filling the air. These were his people, his own flesh and blood, and his heart overflowed with affection for them. More than anything else, he longed for them to be delivered from their unbelief. He wanted them to see that Jesus was not a blasphemer deserving death, but the promised Messiah and the only Savior of sinners. He desired that the same sovereign grace which had rescued him would also rescue them from the judgment to come.
- Yet Paul's love for Israel was far deeper than mere patriotism or national affection. The grace of God had transformed and enlarged his heart until his love for his fellow Jews resembled the sacrificial love of a mother for her endangered child. That is why he could write these extraordinary words: "For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers." His longing echoes the spirit of Moses after Israel's dreadful sin at Mount Sinai. Having received the law from God, Moses descended the mountain only to find the people worshipping the golden calf. Men and women were dancing before an idol, proclaiming that this lifeless image had delivered them from Egypt. It was an appalling act of covenant unfaithfulness. It was as shocking as discovering your bride in the arms of another man on your wedding day.
- Moses had just stood in God's presence as the covenant between the Lord and his people was being confirmed, yet at the very foot of the mountain those who had been redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb were committing spiritual adultery. That is the true nature of sin. It is not merely the breaking of commandments; it is the despising of God's love and the grieving of the God who has entered into covenant with his people. Then we come to one of the noblest moments recorded in the Old Testament. The following day Moses determined to

climb the mountain once more, leaving behind the idolatry of the golden calf in order to plead with God for mercy on behalf of the people.

- Scripture tells us, "Moses said to the people, 'You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.' So Moses went back to the LORD and said, 'Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written'" (Exodus 32:30–32). The original Hebrew conveys extraordinary emotion. Moses' prayer is interrupted by grief. He cries, "Please forgive their sin—" and then the sentence simply breaks off. The dash speaks volumes. His words are choked by sorrow before they can be completed. Standing before the holy God, he struggles even to utter the impossible request forming in his heart. He pauses, gathers himself, and then pleads that if Israel cannot be forgiven, God should blot him out instead. Divine judgment hung over the nation because of their dreadful rebellion, and Moses willingly stepped between a holy God and a guilty people. If only they might be spared, he was prepared to bear the judgment himself. He longed to exchange places with them.
- Of course, Moses could neither accomplish nor be permitted to do such a thing. Yet what Moses desired, the Lord Jesus Christ actually accomplished. At Calvary the Son of God truly took the place of sinners. Paul tells us that "God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Every sin that fills us with shame, every act that horrifies our conscience, every secret guilt we would dread anyone discovering—Christ took it upon himself. Though he never became a sinner, he was made sin for us. He endured the judgment our sins deserved. He entered the darkness of Golgotha and bore the curse in our place. As Paul writes elsewhere, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" (Galatians 3:13).
- The Spirit of Christ is at work in the heart of Paul, giving him a deep yearning for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He looks upon his unbelieving countrymen and wishes that the judgment hanging over them might somehow fall upon him instead. He longs to bear the curse if only they could be spared. Paul knows that such a sacrifice is impossible. Moses could not become Israel's substitute, and neither can Paul. Both men were sinners themselves. Moses had shed blood before God called him to lead Israel. Paul had persecuted the church and consented to the death of God's saints. Both stood in need of the very grace they longed for others to receive. Neither could make atonement because each required atonement. Only one substitute was qualified to stand in the place of guilty sinners. Only one was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. Only one could bear the sins of others because he had no sins of his own. There is only one name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. There is only one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. He alone could endure the curse and satisfy the justice of God.

- Yet what extraordinary love Paul possessed for his fellow Israelites. They had rejected their own Messiah and stood under God's righteous judgment, and Paul's heart cries out, "Could I take their place? I wish that I could." He knows he cannot, but the longing itself reveals the depth of his love. "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers." That is the heart of a true evangelist. Romans chapter 9 gives us one of the clearest glimpses in all of Scripture into the compassionate heart of the greatest missionary and evangelist the world has ever known. The distinguishing mark of a truly God-blessed evangelist is not first found in his methods, his personality, or even his words. It is found in the kind of man he is. What sort of follower of Christ is he? How deeply does he love the people to whom he preaches? What is he like in the secret place, on his knees before God, where only the Lord who alone gives saving power to his Word can see him? Does his heart overflow with tenderness, compassion, and an earnest longing that sinners might be rescued from everlasting judgment?
- When you think of those closest to you—your family, your friends, your neighbors—who continue to reject Christ, does it grieve you? Is your heart burdened that those you love remain without the Savior? Are we asking God to soften our hearts? Are we pleading with him to fill us with more of Christ's compassion? Have we repented of serving him with cold professionalism instead of loving concern? Whenever Paul thought about his fellow Israelites, he was filled with profound sorrow. Their unbelief drove him to prayer and broke his heart. He longs so deeply for the salvation of his people that, were it possible, he would gladly exchange places with them and bear their judgment himself.
- John writes in his 1 John 3:16: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." This is not extraordinary Christianity; it is normal Christianity. Christ's love moves us to love others with the same self-giving spirit. If necessary, we should be willing to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. That is one of the clearest tests that the love of Christ truly dwells within us.

➤ CONCLUSION

- One of the greatest tragedies in the Christian life is our failure to grieve over the countless men and women around us who remain without Christ. Paul's conviction about the lost condition of sinners was matched by an equally deep passion to see them saved. My prayer is that we might become faithful servants of the Good Shepherd, grieving over wandering sheep and calling to those still outside his fold, "Come to the Shepherd! Come to the Savior!" Three consequences arise from Paul's grief that ought to shape our own hearts.
 1. I must feel the reality of hell—that it is real, dreadful, and unimaginably terrible throughout endless eternity. Jesus himself declared, "These will go away into eternal punishment" (Matt. 25:46). Even if someone insists that the "lake of

fire" (Rev. 20:15) or the "fiery furnace" (Matt. 13:42) are symbolic descriptions, the symbols do not lessen the horror. Biblical symbols never exaggerate reality; they point to something even more awful than the picture itself. Our Lord did not use these fearful images to suggest that hell is less painful than burning, but to awaken us to a judgment beyond our fullest comprehension.

2. I must remember that I was once only a breath away from that eternal judgment. Before God saved me, I stood as near to hell as I now stand to this pulpit—or as close as the pew in front of you is to where you sit. Imagine that pew is the very entrance to hell. One small step and the door would swing open, and you would be lost forever. That prison would become your eternal home, a place of utter darkness where the darkness already present in your sinful heart reaches its dreadful completion. It is as though hell itself cries out, "Come! Our desires are your desires. Our rebellion is your rebellion. You belong with us. Child of your father the devil, come home! Join the brood of vipers. Enter the place where the worm never dies, where hope has vanished forever and God is absent in judgment." Eternal torment is only a heartbeat away. God's holy wrath rests upon the sinner. His face is set against all who remain in their sin. His righteous curse abides upon them. Hell is not Satan's invention forced upon an unwilling God. It is God's own righteous judgment against unrepentant sin.
3. I must feel that every ounce of righteousness in the universe stands on God's side and against me apart from Christ. If my life is weighed in the scales of divine justice, I am found lighter than vanity itself. I possess no claim upon God's mercy and no grounds upon which to protest his verdict. Every excuse is silenced. My mouth is stopped before the Judge of all the earth, and if I am permitted to speak at all, all I can say is, "I deserve this, but I wish it were not so." Scripture declares that every imagination of the human heart is continually inclined toward evil, and therefore God's sentence is altogether righteous. That realization should drive me to one place only—to Jesus Christ. There alone is safety. There is no refuge in heaven or on earth equal to being united to the Son of God. Therefore, I must cry to God until I know that I belong to Christ, for the Scriptures promise, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." May that be true of us. May we be found in him, and may we give God no rest until we know by faith that we are his.