

## The Greatest Missionary Who Ever Lived!

The Apostle Paul was the greatest missionary who ever lived. We know this is true because of what his enemies said about him. His enemies called him the ringleader of a sect that was growing so fast that it was filling the known world with its teaching. Paul was imprisoned on more than one occasion to control his influence. But even in prison his letters were powerful enough to fuel the fires of devotion among his followers.

Paul was sovereignly prepared to be a missionary before he ever met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Though of purest Hebrew blood (Phil 3:5), "circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, (bearing the name of the eminent man of that tribe, King Saul,) a Hebrew of the Hebrews," yet his birthplace was the Gentile Tarsus. (Acts 21:39, "I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city.") His father, as himself, was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). Tarsus was celebrated as a school of Greek literature. Here he acquired that knowledge of Greek authors and philosophy which qualified him for dealing with learned Gentiles and appealing to their own writers (Acts 17:18-28.) Here too he learned the Cilician trade of making tents of the goats' hair cloth called "cilicium" (Acts 18:3).

He possessed the Roman citizenship from birth (Acts 22:28), and hence, when he commenced ministering among Gentiles, he preferred to be known by his Roman name Paul rather than by his Hebrew name Saul. His main education (probably after passing his first 12 years at Tarsus, Acts 26:4-5, was at Jerusalem "at the feet of GAMALIEL (which see), taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" (Acts 22:3). Thus the three elements of the world's culture met in him: Roman citizenship, Grecian culture, Hebrew religion.

But being sovereignly prepared physically and socially was not the greatest reason he became the greatest missionary who ever lived. In Romans 9:1-3 we find that reason.

Rom 9:1-3

9:1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,

2 That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.

3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:

KJV

Paul lived with great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart. This phrase was a phrase that Paul would use to describe the grief that he felt when someone dear to him died. For example Paul's friend and co-laborer Ephaphroditus was sick unto death. Paul mentions this in...

Phil 2:27

27 For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

KJV

Paul knew that if his friend would have died, he would have experienced sorrow upon sorrow because of the loss of this friendship.

In Roman's 9 Paul confessed that he lived with this same kind of sorrow in his heart. But it was not caused by the death of a dear friend. It was caused by the fact that his brethren the Jews were lost.

You can always tell what is important to a man by what causes him his greatest grief. It is natural for us to feel this grief over the loss of someone we love. Paul loved all those who were lost, especially his brethren the Jews, and their loss caused him to have great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart.

This great heaviness and continual sorrow was a good thing.

It motivated Paul to take great risks to reach the lost. He traveled extensively in an unsafe world to bring the gospel to the lost. He often talked of what he risked and the suffering and inconveniences he experienced in his travels to reach the lost. He also risked his life by challenging the lost with the truth that Jesus was Lord and the not the false gods that they worshiped. He also risked his life by defying the Roman government and refusing to remain silent about what he believed.

It also motivated Paul to adapt himself to the cultures he lived in to reach the lost. Being raised as a strict Pharisee, Paul had more customs than most that he was willing to abandon in order to reach the lost. He said this about these customs...

1 Cor 9:19-23

19 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

23 And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

KJV

Paul found a release for this great heaviness and continual sorrow. He found it in prayer for those who were lost. He found it going to the lost, living among them, and sharing his faith with them.

Paul could have used his great mind and even his beliefs to lighten the burden or dismiss the burden. He could have dismissed the burden by accepting theological arguments based on the doctrine of election and the resulting philosophical arguments that the results are up to God. But Paul did not use such arguments to lighten his burden. In fact this confession in Romans 9:1-3 is at the beginning of his famous treatise on election. Paul did not use his own understanding of the doctrine of election to dismiss the burden.

He also refused to allow his naysayers to detour him from the burden.

There were naysayers who said that this agenda was to build his popularity. There were naysayers who said that Paul had changed and forsaken vital truths that all good Jews believed. There were naysayers who said that the churches that Paul started were populated by heathens and worldly members. There are naysayers who said that Paul was compromising in his methods and was using unbiblical and worldly means to win the lost. There were naysayers who said that Paul not teaching his converts to live holy and pure lives after the customs of his people. Perhaps Paul did not listen to the naysayers because he knew their heart. He knew that they did not share his great heaviness and continual sorrow. They were not soul winners and were making disciples that were soul winners.

**Their impotent condition disqualified them from being credible critics of his motives or his methods!**

We all have different mile stones in our lives that cause us to evaluate what we have done and where we are headed. When I turned 50 in 2004 I experienced one of these mile stones. As I evaluated what I had done and where I was headed I was confronted with my own personal impotence in reaching the lost and the impotence that I observed in the church that I have served for so many years.

I realized that I personally felt totally detached from the lost community in which I lived. I did not have a friend that was lost that I was talking to on a regular basis about the savior. I was a 50 year old Pastor who spent almost all of my life shepherding the found and my found family.

Once a year I would do a basketball camp with my friend Bob Hoffman and meet lost kids. I would live with these kids for a week and preach the gospel to them. I am always amazed at how many respond to the invitation at the end of the camp. I would guess over 1000 have responded over the more than 20 years that we have been doing this together.

But with this exception, I was impotent in my own community. Can anyone else identify with me? Is the Lord stirring something in you like He is stirring in me?

I observed the same impotency in most of the best men I had known. Some of the best men I knew were men that I had served as Pastor. They loved their wife. They raised their children to fear God. They were men of integrity. They were extra mile servants. They were generous. I counted it a privilege to be the Pastor of such fine men. But it was my observation that these fine men are impotent as well as far as reaching the lost in the community in which they lived.

**With the exception of the members of their own family, there were only two members of our church that had been won to the Lord by one of these men since 1994.**

I had this thought.

If through some great tragedy some of the finest families I know perished every one of them, there would not be one person to greet them in heaven that they had won to the Lord and personally disciplined in the last ten years.

As I looked at our culture, I could see how this impotency was causing us to lose the moral cultural war. It is amazing the immorality our society is willing to tolerate. It is astonishing what our society allows their children to see and do. But the truth is our society is comprised of heathens and hedonists. They are living the way heathens and hedonists live.

At age 50 I could see that we will never win the moral cultural war through politics or education or only reaching our children or only reproducing a disciple every 20 years or retreating into our homes with those who are likeminded. I could see that....

We were losing the moral cultural war because the heathens are reproducing more heathens than we were reproducing disciples. I concluded the only way we will win the cultural moral war is to find a cure for our impotence in the church.

Winning the cultural moral war should not even be our goal. What believer would not want a more moral society for our children and our grandchildren? Who would not want a better society that supports our family moral values? Who would not want a government that supports our moral values and that limits its involvement in our lives based on the biblical mandates for civil government?

While these are all good desires and show our love for others that are dear to us, winning the cultural moral war should never be the goal.

The goal is the salvation of those who are lost!

Jesus never said that His goal was to change society by winning the cultural moral war. He did say that he came to seek and save that which was lost. One obviously leads to the other when the lost are found in great numbers. We have seen society change through out church history through revival and spiritual awakening. But the aim must be to save the lost.

This aim will not be fulfilled until we have the great heaviness and continual sorrow for the lost that Paul experienced.

As we saw last week it was a burden that Jesus carried for the lost. This burden was caused by his perspective of the lost. He saw them as His lost sheep, His lost children, and His lost brood.

For us to have His heart we must have His perspective. They are our brothers and sisters who are lost. They are our dear friends who are lost. Paul called the lost Jews his

kinsmen who were his brethren. If we have the right perspective about the lost we will have a growing burden for them. It will resemble what a father has for his child that is lost.

Having this heart is a spiritual condition that always precedes revival, spiritual awakening, and a flood of evangelistic effort and success. It is a sovereign work of grace that my flesh resists and my mind debates. At age 55 my flesh is longing for a life of ease and my mind is arguing for a different occupation with less stress

This spiritual condition causes good men to pray in earnest and creates a fertile ground for creative minds to dream dreams and have visions for reaching the lost.

This spiritual condition needs to be encouraged and nurtured so that it will grow. If you are a naysayer, stop it. Repent or just quietly remove yourself.

We are currently witnessing a renewal of social concern in our nation because of the earthquake in Haiti. There is currently an enormous outpouring of genuine compassion for all of the lost people and children that are orphans. Everywhere we turn we see images that evoke feelings of mercy from even the most callous individuals. Donation efforts are at an all time high because of the pictures of devastation and the stories of suffering. Song writers are reviving old songs to inspire people to give and new songs are being written. The Hollywood stars are using their personal media time and their spots on late night television to raise the level of public concern.

This is a good thing. But it is a reproof to me and to the church. I am surrounded by hoards of lost people who are passing away every day only to face conditions and suffering that exceeds anything that exists in Haiti. Our concern for these lost people should far surpass what we are seeing in the current renewal of social concern for the people of Haiti.

We need a change of heart.

**Rom 9:1-3**

**9:1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,**

**2 That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.**

We need Paul's heart for his brethren the Jews. It was this same heart for the gentiles that motivated him to embark on the greatest missionary enterprise the world has ever seen. We need the heart of Jesus for us that led Him to pursue us with such passion when we were so lost.

That is my prayer for me. It is my prayer for you. Change our hearts Oh God. Give us your heart for the lost! Amen!

