Do We Really Care?

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I am speaking the truth in Christ-I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit- 2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. 4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; 5 to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen." (Romans 9:1-5).

1. Coronavirus Vaccine

A coronavirus vaccine is a hot topic these days. Currently more than 140 teams of researchers are in the process of developing a vaccine. If the vaccines are approved, these treatments will help the general public combat the virus.

The people developing the vaccines feel the pressure to develop a vaccine quickly. But there may still be those who might reject taking the vaccine. Such a rejection could be heartbreaking to their family.

2. Paul and the Israelites

Today's scripture Romans 9:1-5 tells us that Paul had this kind of anguish over the rejection of the gospel by most of the Jews. He says in verses 2 & 3, *"**I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh**."*

Paul shares his strong desire for the salvation of the Jewish people. Paul wished this to the point that he might be cursed in the place of his people. Although Paul says in Romans 8:39, nothing and no one is able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, Paul is willing to sacrifice himself for his fellow Jews.

Why was Paul so devastated? The Israelites were blessed by the Lord in many ways; Paul lists seven privileges that they have received: the adoption as sons, the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the Ten Commandment, the temple worship, and the promises. The people were in the line of promise from the calling of Abraham to the coming of the Messiah.

Paul's love and willingness to sacrifice himself for his people reminds us of the prayer of Moses. He prayed for the forgiveness of his people.

Moses prayed, "***please forgive their sin-but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written***" (Exodus 32:32). Like Moses, Paul was willing to be punished by God for the sake of the Israelites. Where did Paul's willingness come from? Paul likely was following the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus sacrificed his life for God's people.

Paul reminds the Romans and us that Jesus came into the world as a Jew. Paul says that the Jews are so blessed by the Lord. Yet the Israelites rejected Jesus and crucified him on the cross. And many of them did not accept Jesus as their savior. What did Paul do when he learned that the Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah? In Acts 13:46, Paul and Barnabas say, ***"It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it…, we are now turning to the Gentiles."*** Since many Jews did not recognize Jesus as Messiah, Paul began to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. Did Paul give up on his people? Not at all, Paul says, "***Did God reject his people? By no means***" (Romans 11:1). "***All Israel will be saved***" (Romans 11:26).

We might have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in our heart because of the unbelieving spouse, brothers, sisters, children, grandchildren or friends. What do we have to do with the nonbelieving family? Paul would say, "let God take care of them." God will use us to bring other people in our community to Christ with the blessings that we have received.

3. We Are Blessed

It might be difficult to count our blessings in our current situation. However, Paul reminds us how much we are blessed in Ephesians 1:3 and the following. ***"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 just as he chose us in Christ."***

Paul tells us that God blessed us by choosing us for salvation, adopting us as his children, forgiving us, giving us insight, the gifts of the Spirit, the power to do God's will, and the hope of living forever with Christ.

Why did God bless the Jews and us? In Genesis 12:3, God says, "***I will bless those who bless you; …. and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed***." The purpose of God's blessings is that God wants all the families of the earth to be blessed through us. We are blessed to share the blessings with others.

4. Sharing God's Blessings

How can we share God's blessings with others in our current situation? In the era of the Protestant Reformation, an outbreak of bubonic plague struck in Wittenberg, Germany in August 1527. The bubonic plague was a highly contagious disease, and many died from contracting the plague. Most people in the village left, leaving the sick behind. Martin Luther was ordered to leave, but he refused. He said, "we die at our posts. Christian doctors cannot abandon their hospitals, Christian governors cannot flee their districts, Christian pastors cannot abandon their congregations. We must be prepared to die. Luther stayed in Wittenberg with his pregnant wife Katharina and opened his house as a ward for the sick. His daughter Elizabeth died because of it. He practiced sanitation, medication, self-quarantine, and social distancing to help stop the spread.

Why did Martin Luther stay in Wittenberg? It was because he remembered what Jesus said to his disciples; "***you shall love your neighbor as yourself***" (Mark 12:31). In order to serve his neighbors, Luther chose to risk his own life and his family. During the weeks of plague, death, stress and heartache, Luther penned the hymn, "A mighty Fortress is our God."

5. Conclusion

After Paul's conversion, Paul's own people became his enemy. The Jewish people persecuted Paul in many ways. Paul says, "***Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.*** [25] ***Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning."*** (2 Corinthians 11:24-25). Yet despite persecution, Paul desired for his own people to come to Christ. He really cared about his people.

6. Application

We all want the pandemic to end quickly, but God may be giving us an opportunity in the meantime to serve others. The question is, "Do we really care about our neighbors?" I am so happy that we will have a blessing box. I am sure that people in our community will be blessed by our "blessing box." But the Bible tells us that we are blessed in many ways. We are blessing boxes. Are we excited that our neighbors would experience God's blessings through us and our church? Amen.