

“The Romans Road of Salvation” (Colossians 4:2–6)(7.24.22)

Colossians 4:2–6 (NIV84)

²Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.³And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“The Romans Road of Salvation”**

INTRODUCTION:

We started the Emmaus Pickleball outreach four weeks ago. We have had 21 people from the community show up altogether and three of us from the church. A community is coming together, being formed. There are 41 people using the TeamReach APP signed up with the Emmaus Group. People are having fun, meeting new people, and getting some exercise.

And, it is definitely working as an outreach. As we get to know each other, people are opening up and sharing. Many people have challenges in their daily lives. One woman has a special needs daughter. Another woman is caring for her husband who is recovering from illness. Some have had health problems. Others have been injured, even while playing pickleball, but thankfully not here. Some are in retirement. Others have children still living at home.

I have had many conversations about various situations. We have talked about raising kids in this day and age; schools and bullying. We have talked about abortion and human sexuality. We have talked about teenage suicide. Real people facing real issues – asking questions and wondering aloud about this time in which we live.

Our scripture this morning is perfectly suited to our efforts to reach our community for Jesus Christ. It is my prayer that our Heavenly Father will draw these souls to Himself with cords of love. May God the Holy Spirit be at work in us and those with whom we come in contact.

BODY:

Paul calls on us to be wise in the way we act toward outsiders; [and to] make the most of every opportunity. Through our Pickleball outreach we

are attempting to create more opportunities for interaction with quote “outsiders.” Many of us, especially we who are older and have been Christians for many years, live in a Christian bubble. Our interactions with outsiders is limited and usually not in a forum that would lend itself to discussing issues of faith and God.

Who does Paul mean by outsiders? Let me give you a fairly long quote from the book *Engaging the Closed Minded: Presenting Your Faith to the Confirmed Unbeliever* by Dan Story. I believe he gives a good description of outsiders and he divides them into four groups:

“Four Views of God

In evangelism and apologetics, you will encounter four kinds of non-Christians in terms of their beliefs (or disbeliefs) in God. Paul and other New Testament evangelists encountered these same four varieties in the first century.

In Acts 17:1–3 Paul witnesses, “as his custom was,” to the Jews in Thessalonica. The first type of unbeliever, which both Paul and we encounter, are those who believe in the God of Scripture (or a close facsimile) but reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in the Christian sense—or have never met Him. Today this group includes not only Orthodox

Jews but also Muslims, Unitarians, and some Christian cults.

Further in the chapter (vv. 16–22), Paul witnesses to the Gentiles in Athens. These people represent a second variety of unbelievers: those who are “religious,” like the Greeks, but have no concept of, or reject, the one true (Christian) God. Today, this group includes all primitive, polytheistic, and pantheistic religions: Animism (tribal religions), Mormonism, Scientology, the Unification Church, UFO religions, witchcraft, Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age cults, and so on.

Today’s religious scene also includes a large number of people who have no affiliation with any kind of religion at all: agnostics and atheists. Most likely Paul seldom encountered this variety of unbelievers because, as Stephen Neill points out, “Until recent times, it could be taken for granted that the vast majority of human beings, if they were not Christians, would be adherents of some identifiable religion.” Nevertheless, atheism did exist in biblical times. Psalm 14:1 teaches that only a fool says in his heart, “There is no God,” confirming that atheism existed centuries before Christ. Today, this group includes secular humanists, communists, materialists, naturalists, many existentialists, and others who hold atheistic philosophies.

Finally, there is a fourth category of people. I want to spend more time on this group, and you may be surprised that I include it in a list of non-Christian types. Perhaps the apostle Paul was referring to this group of unbelievers in Titus 1:16 where he states, "They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him."

I believe these people comprise a large segment of the so-called Christian population today, especially in the United States and Europe. I'm speaking here of people who claim to be Christians (and probably believe they are) and thus think they are saved, when in fact they are not Christians and are not saved.

These people identify themselves as Christians because they live in a country that (historically, at least) was predominately Christian. They are "Christian" by culture or upbringing but not by personal commitment. Because of their lifestyle, these people show no indication of being Christian in spite of their claims. In other words, although they think of themselves as Christian, they do not function within a Christian framework; they do not actively promote the Christian worldview; they do not give any indication by word or deed that they are believers. They seldom or never go to church. In short, they are more secular than Christian.

Although only the Lord knows their true relationship with Him, I believe these people need to hear the gospel message and need to make a personal commitment to Jesus Christ.”

In the book *The Quest for Truth: Theology for a Postmodern World* by F. Leroy Forlines, he writes,

“In our rescue work, no matter where we are, we have to take into account that the image of God is being held captive by depravity.

We must come to an understanding of what is holding the image of God hostage in the location where we are working. We must also come to an understanding of what it is that is hindering the rescue effort in the case or cases where we are involved in a rescue effort.”

In a similar train of thought, one of my seminary professors, the Rev. Dr. Leonard Sweet shared on social media on Friday: “All my writing and research is based on a simple semiotic notion: **you don't meet people where they are; you meet Jesus where he is in the midst of people where they are.**”

In my attempt to encourage you to share your faith, you may find all this a little discouraging. It may seem overwhelming. How can we possibly be up to task? For me to remind you that it is a

command of Lord Jesus to go into the world and make disciples doesn't help very much. What are we to do?

Pray. We are to devote ourselves to prayer. Devote means to commit by a solemn act, to dedicate and consecrate ourselves to prayer. Instead of devote, some translations say continue steadfastly in prayer. So, this call to prayer is an ongoing and serious act of faithfulness.

Most likely you have heard of the term "prayer life" before. The most common interpretation of prayer life assumes it to be a subset of our life. Paul is saying here that prayer is to be so fully incorporated into our life that it becomes our natural realm – where we live and breathe and walk. To put it another way, prayer should permeate our lives into the very nooks and crannies of our being.

What is the mystery of Christ to which Paul refers? He most prominently addresses it in Ephesians 3:1–13. Here are only two verses from that pericope:

⁸Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this

mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Hear this from the Lexham Theological Wordbook:

“The concept of mystery in scripture is intimately connected with God’s revelation. The biblical idea is different from the primary English sense of mystery or mysterious, which involves something hidden and unknown. In contrast, the biblical concept involves something that was formerly unknown by human beings, but has subsequently been revealed by God to a person or group, though it remains a mystery for others until it is explained. This often has to do with doctrines or prophecies God has given to his people;”

That brings us to **The Romans Road of Salvation:**

Romans 3:23 (NIV84)

²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 3:10 (NIV84)

¹⁰As it is written:

“There is no one righteous, not even one;

Romans 5:12 (NIV84)

¹²Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—

Romans 6:23 (NIV84)

²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 5:8 (NIV84)

⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 10:9 (NIV84)

⁹That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:13 (NIV84)

¹³for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Romans 5:1 (NIV84)

5 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 8:1 (NIV84)

8 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

Romans 8:38–39 (NIV84)

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I highly encourage you to put this roadmap, the insert in your bulletin, in your Bibles. It can be an aid to you and to your sharing your faith.

CONCLUSION:

Yesterday, I emailed Lisa Whitaker and asked her about her experience with evangelism and prayer. Lisa is one of the missionaries that YOU support as she teaches disciple making with Youth With a Mission all across the world.

Here is her reply: Hey Don,

Thanks for asking . . . I have so many stories that would illustrate this very principle [the connection between prayer and evangelism]. In fact we don't do evangelism apart from prayer - they are part of the same teaching, experience and practice.

When I read your note, a story I have written up for my "book" whenever that actually gets done came to mind. It took place in 1994: (for the sake of time, I am editing it)

We were a team of fifteen in a very difficult part of Russia. There were many different nationalities living in this region that was known for its poverty and crime. You may have heard of this place on the news and thought, who would ever go there? Well, we would. Actually, God does, all the time. He loves to send His children to places where people need to know His love in a big way. Just ask Him.

So, there we were, an international group of young men and women, traveling through a war zone in Chechnya to get to Dagestan. Our specific destination was the 5,000 year old city of Derbent. We went there without any set up ahead of time. We went there because someone had just asked us to come, but that someone didn't have anything set up for us to do except to come and live in a very "bare-bones", empty, children's home in the heat of summer.

Since we weren't sure what we would do for the 2 months we were there, we decided it would be a good idea to pray about it and just ask God what His ideas might be for our team. As we listened

together, various ideas came forth. There was a pre-school next door to where we were living and some of our team had experience teaching young children. Maybe some of us could offer to help with the children. Someone else felt like God was leading us to go to a hospital and offer help there, possibly cleaning or visiting patients. Another person felt like we should go visit the mayor and just ask him what we should do.

When that idea came forth, a few of us sort of looked at each other with a tinge of fear and a not a small amount of doubt. Go ask the mayor? We were a random group of students who showed up in this city, mind you, this city that was in a very unstable part of the newly dismembered Soviet Union. We weren't sure we even wanted the mayor to know we were there, let alone go and visit him!

We continued to pray about these ideas and in the end we all felt like we needed to move forward with what God was telling us. As the co-leader of the team, I was volunteered along with Tanya, one of the other leaders, to be the team representatives that would go visit the mayor.

The next day, we attempted to dress as one would to go see the mayor. The team prayed for us and off we went. We really had no idea what we would say except to let him know we were there and just

ask if he had any ideas of ways we could serve the city.

The mayor, a short, dark-haired man in a black suit stood up from his desk, came around, shook our hands and said, "Have a seat".

Tanya explained, "We are a group of university students and have come to Derbent for two months to serve the city." She continued to say, "We are planning to help out at a preschool and a hospital, but we thought we might come and ask you if you had any ideas of how we could serve the city?"

You can imagine the look on his face. He leaned back in his chair, obviously thinking and taking in what she said. She then added, "We really are willing to do anything, clean up, do menial type tasks, we are open to suggestions.

He asked us, "So, you are willing to do anything?"

We hesitantly shook our heads yes and then he said, "well, as mayor, I am responsible for the welfare of the widows and poor in our city. Here is a list by address of all the widows and needy. Would your group be able to visit them with a loaf of bread and a package of tea from the mayor's office?"

Tanya and I looked at each other and smiled. "So, you are asking us to go be your ambassadors to these widows and needy by visiting them and giving them some bread and tea?"

"YES", he replied. We could not believe it. "We would love to do that for you Mr. Mayor." A look of relief came across his face and he smiled broadly. He handed us the list, gave a few further instructions and then thanked us profusely.

Tanya and I walked out of that office in disbelief. When we got down the hallway, we turned to each other. Did the mayor just send us door to door on his behalf? Were we just given government approval to knock on doors and visit the citizens of this town with bread and tea?

We returned back to the dormitory where we were staying and called the team together. "You will not believe it, but the mayor has asked us to take bread and tea door to door on behalf of his office." Blank stares turned into smiles and laughter as our team stood stunned and thrilled with this opportunity. We immediately sent a few team members out to buy bags of fresh bread and packets of loose tea as we made plans to head out on our mayor-endorsed mission.

Another team member and I made our way to one of the addresses on our list. We knocked on the

door and waited. A plump grandmother wearing an apron that looked like it had cooked a thousand meals tentatively answered the door. We smiled and proudly proclaimed, "Hello, we are here on behalf of the mayor. We would like to give you a loaf of bread and some tea".

Her hesitant, guarded expression softened. "Really?", she asked. "Really", we replied. We then explained, "We are an international group of students. We have come to serve your city and the mayor has asked us to visit you." The door swung wide open and our new friend welcomed us into her home, "Come in, come in."

She led us to her kitchen, immediately put the tea kettle on the stove, opened up the bag with the bread and plopped the loaf on her counter. Out came a knife and before we could say anything, she had sliced the bread, pulled out a jar of homemade preserves and began to prepare a humble, but breathtakingly beautiful tea party.

We sat at her table for an hour, just talking, telling her where we were from and why we had come to serve the city. We listened as she slowly told us a bit of her story, about her husband, her children, her opinion of current affairs. She was so eager to both ask questions and share, it was obvious she was not in a hurry for us to leave. We had to

explain that we needed to deliver a few more loaves of bread.

There were tears in her eyes as we stood up to go. "Thank you", she managed to say softly. "Thank you, for the bread, for the tea, and thank you for visiting. Please come back".

Our door-to-door visits introduced us to an amazing group of mostly older women. We came across those who needed the bread desperately, those who needed a visit, those who asked for prayer, those who asked us questions about life and faith and God. It was truly an open door for our team. The sad part was there were so many names on the list that even with fifteen of us going out several times a week, we still were not able to visit everyone on the list.

We DID visit ALOT. We were ambassadors on behalf of the mayor and we were ambassadors on behalf of the ONE who created each and everyone of those precious widows. We had gone to a very unstable, scary, dark part of Russia and had an opportunity to bring light and life to a few of her citizens.

Try praying this prayer and then waiting silently . . .
. Lord, I'm asking you today . . . what is on your heart? How can I join You in what You are already doing around me?

Amen and amen. Let us pray.

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