

(PP1) Romans 9:1-5
“The Ultimate Sacrifice”

I don't know about you, but I love to hear inspirational stories about someone who makes a great sacrifice to show the extent of their love and devotion to someone else. I was recently touched by one such story.

It all started in Winchester, Massachusetts, 52 years ago, when Rick Hoyt was born (January 10, 1962). Somehow his umbilical cord got wrapped around his neck, leaving him brain-damaged, and unable to control his limbs.

The doctors told Rick's parents that he would live in a vegetative state for the rest of his life. But Dick Hoyt, Rick's father, didn't believe it. He noticed the way Rick's eyes followed him around the room.

When Rick was 11, his parents took him to the engineering department at Tufts University, and they asked if there was anything that would help their son to communicate. “No way,” Rick's parents were told. A doctor then added, “There's nothing going on in his brain.”

Rick's father looked at the doctors and said, “Tell him a joke.” One of the doctors did, and Rick laughed. It turns out that a lot was going on in Rick's brain. The doctors decided to rig up a computer that allowed Rick to control the cursor by touching a switch with the side of his head. Rick was finally able to communicate. Do you want to know what his first words were? “Go Bruins!”

After a high school classmate of Rick's was paralyzed in an accident, the school organized a charity run to benefit Rick's classmate. Rick pecked out on his computer, “Dad, I want to do that.”

As he considered his son's request, Dick thought, “Yeah, right! How am I, a ‘porker,’ who's never run more than a mile at a time, going to push my son five miles?” Still, he tried.

After the first run, and still sore two weeks later, Dick said, “Now it is me who's handicapped!”

But that day changed Rick's life. "Dad," he typed, "when we were running, it felt like I wasn't disabled anymore!" And that sentence changed Dick's life. He became obsessed with giving Rick that feeling as often as he could. He got into such good physical shape, that he and Rick were ready to try the 1979 Boston Marathon.

The race officials told Dick, "No way!" You see, the Hoyt's weren't quite a single runner, but they weren't quite a wheelchair competitor either. So, for the first few years, Dick and Rick just joined the massive field of runners, and ran anyway.

Later, they found a way to get into the race officially. In 1983 they ran another marathon so fast they made the qualifying time for Boston the following year. Then a friend suggested to Dick, "Why not a triathlon?"

Dick's response? "How's a guy who never learned to swim, and who hasn't ridden a bike since he was six, going to haul his 110-pound kid through a triathlon?" Still, Dick tried.

Together, Rick and Dick have done 212 triathlons, including four grueling 15-hour Ironman Competitions in Hawaii. At ages 65 and 43, Dick and Rick finished their 24th Boston Marathon, in only 5,083rd place, out of more than 20,000 starters.

Their best time? Two hours, 40 minutes in 1992 - only 35 minutes off the world record! Is this not an incredible story of the sacrificial love of one person for another? I wanted to share this story with you this morning because I think it illustrates the same kind of sacrificial love that the Apostle Paul has for his fellow Jews.

(PP2) Listen carefully for the depth and sincerity of Paul's love for his people. Paul says, "My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters." Why? Because, just like Paul in his early days before Jesus revealed himself to Paul on the Damascus Road, the Jews were rejecting the truth about Jesus that could save them.

Like a parent, full of love and concern for the wellbeing of those he loves, Paul expresses his anguish over not being able to

“fix” the situation. Paul is so distraught over his Jewish brothers and sisters rejecting their salvation, that he says, “I would be willing to be forever cursed – cut off completely from Christ! – if that would save them.

Now think about this. Paul is saying that he would be willing to forfeit his very own salvation to eternal life, and face eternal destruction – **IF** – his Jewish brothers and sisters would only accept the truth about Jesus, and be saved. To me, that is epitome of sacrificial love! And we know Paul’s love for his people was genuine and sincere –because his life proved it!

After his conversion, Paul spent the rest of his life seeking to share the Good News that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, and the promised Messiah of God’s people. And, although some believed, Paul message was rejected by many.

On his first missionary journey, Paul preached boldly that in Jesus, there is forgiveness of sin, and that everyone who believes in him is freed from all guilt, and declared right with God – something the Law could never do. For his efforts, the Jewish leaders become jealous of Paul, and they stir up a mob that runs Paul and Barnabas out of town.

When Paul preached in Lystra and Derbe, some Jews from Antioch and Iconium come down, and they turn the crowds into a murderous mob. The crowd stones Paul, and then drags him out of the city, apparently dead. Unbelievably, Paul gets up and goes back into the city!

On Paul’s second missionary journey, Paul and Silas are stripped and publicly beaten with wooden rods, and then, they are imprisoned – all because Paul heals a young slave girl of demon possession. How would you like that for a “thank you?”

When Paul arrived in Corinth, and explained to the Jews that the Messiah they were looking for was Jesus, the Jews oppose Paul, and insult him by kicking him out of the synagogue.

You would think Paul would have had enough abuse at this point, however, on his third Missionary journey, as Paul ministers in Ephesus, an idol manufacturer incites a mob to kill Paul.

In Jerusalem, Paul is arrested because some Jews claim that he is teaching Jews everywhere to turn their backs on the Jewish law. And, on his way to Rome, Paul is shipwrecked, and bitten by a poisonous snake. Even under house arrest in Rome, Paul seeks to share the Good News about Jesus.

Do you see what I mean here? Paul was willing to sacrifice his entire life, so that God's people might be saved. And you know what, God did the same for each of us!

(PP3) John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life. Our Heavenly Father loves us so much that He offers to us life with him forever, beyond our physical deaths, through faith in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God.

But let me ask you, why do we even have to experience physical death? Well, it is because our sin, and our rebellion against God and his authority, separate us from the relationship God intended for us to have with him, when he created the world.

Yet God, in his infinite love for us, does not want us to stay separated from him, because of our sin. That is why God made the ultimate sacrifice, and sent his son Jesus into the world. The Good News we sinners have is that in the birth of Jesus, God himself came into the world as a man – because Jesus was God in the flesh.

He was tempted to sin against God, just as we are, yet he never sinned against God in any way. He lived the perfect life of servant hood, in obedience to God the Father.

However, Jesus was put to a horrible death by suffering crucifixion on a cross. In death, his perfect life became the sacrifice offered up to God – once for all time – for the forgiveness of all sin – past, present, and future. God the Father raised Christ from the dead, conquering sin and death.

Jesus the Christ ascended to heaven, and now, he sits in the place of honor at the right hand of God the Father. He has been given all authority to judge all people – the living and the dead.

(PP4) Jesus is the one all the prophets in the Old Testament

testified about saying, “Everyone who believes in him, will have their sins forgiven, through his name.”

Just as Paul sacrificed his life to share the Good News of Jesus Christ; our Lord Jesus sacrificed his life too, so that all of us who trust in him have God’s promise of salvation from sin and death, and the gift of eternal life with God.

(PP5) Today, we celebrate together the suffering, the endurance, and the victory of our Lord Jesus through Holy Communion. As we receive once again the body and blood of our Savior who gives us new life, may each of us be truly thankful in our hearts, for Christ’s ultimate sacrifice on our behalf. May God bless you all. Amen.

Sermon Notes**Romans 9:1-5****“The Ultimate Sacrifice”**

- We often love to hear inspirational stories about someone who makes a great sacrifice to show the extent of their love and devotion to someone else. The Apostle Paul’s life illustrates the sacrificial love he has for his fellow Jews.
- Paul says that he would be willing to forfeit his very own salvation to eternal life, and face eternal destruction – **IF** – his Jewish brothers and sisters would only accept the truth about Jesus, and be saved. That is sacrificial love!
- After his conversion, Paul spent the rest of his life seeking to share the Good News that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, and the promised Messiah of God’s people. And, although some believed, Paul was rejected by many.
- Paul was willing to sacrifice his entire life, so that his people might be saved. And, so did our God!
- John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life. Our Heavenly Father loves us so much that He offers to us life with him forever, beyond our physical deaths, through faith in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God.
- God’s Word proclaims, “Everyone who believes in him, will have their sins forgiven, through his (Jesus’) name.”
- Just as Paul sacrificed his life to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Jesus sacrificed his life too, so that all who trust in him have God’s promise of salvation from sin and death, and the gift of eternal life with God.
- In the celebration of Holy Communion, we receive once again the body and blood of our Savior who gives us new life. May we be truly thankful in our hearts, for Christ’s ultimate sacrifice on our behalf.

May God bless you!

Scripture Lesson
Romans 9:1-5
“The Ultimate Sacrifice”

1 With Christ as my witness, I speak with utter truthfulness. My conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm it.

2 My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief

3 for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them.

4 They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God’s adopted children. God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises.

5 Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, the one who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.