A Pastor's Heart

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[0:00] But if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, Romans chapter 10, Romans chapter 10, and if we read again at verse 13, Romans 10 and verse 13, where Paul writes, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.

How are they to preach unless they are sent? Next to the Bible, the best book that I've ever read is a book written by two seasoned pastors, Derek Plyme and Alistair Begg. The book was originally called Pastors and Teachers, and it was written by the senior of the two senior pastors or seasoned pastors. It was written, first of all, by the late Derek Plyme. Now, Derek Plyme, he was a pastor in Edinburgh, in Charlotte Chapel for many, many years. And in 2020, he fought his good fight and he finished the course and he was taken home to be with the Lord at the age of 89. Prior to his passing away, his original book was updated and expanded upon with the help of his ministry apprentice from many, many years ago, who was Alistair Begg, who himself, if you know anything about Alistair Begg, if you ever listen to Alistair Begg sermons, you'll know that he now is a seasoned pastor. He's just actually recently announced his retirement at the age of 72. Although Alistair Begg, he wouldn't officially step down as the senior pastor of Parkside Baptist Church in Cleveland until next year.
So he said that his finishing date is on the 14th of September, 2025. And I was just looking it up the other day, and just as an aside, Alistair Begg, he explained the significance of his chosen retirement date. And this is what he said, that particular day will be 50 years since I began with Derek Plyme at Charlotte Chapel. It will be 49 years since I was ordained to the gospel ministry, and it will be 42 years since I had the privilege of beginning my ministry. And so the book, which was written together by these two seasoned pastors, Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, it's a book called On Being a Pastor.
On Being a Pastor, so that's the answer to your first question. And as I said, next to the Bible, this is the best book I've ever read. And next to the Bible, this is the book that changed my life.
In fact, it was the first chapter in this book that changed my life, because the first chapter is all about the call and the calling. The call and the calling. And you know, when I read chapter one of On Being a Pastor, I could tell you even where I read it and when I read it, what time of day it was.
[3:28] When I read chapter one of On Being a Pastor, I could relate to everything that was being said in that chapter. So much so that it gave me clarity about my call, and it even confirmed my call into ministry. And it's this concept of the call into ministry that I want us to think about this evening. And I want us to think about not from my perspective, but from the perspective of the Apostle Paul. Because here in Romans chapter 10, Paul, you could say he exposes, he expresses, and he explains to us a pastor's heart. And Paul does this by emphasizing, first of all, the pastor's concern, and then the pastor's call. The pastor's concern, and then the pastor's call.

So first of all, the pastor's concern. You see it there in verse one. This is the pastor's concern. He says there, verse one, brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. My heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.
If you were here this morning, then you'll know that today is ministry Sunday. It's the day that was set aside by our presbytery to pray and also to preach about the vacancies in our denomination, and also our vision to reach the lost. Because as Solomon said, without vision, the people perish. And as I mentioned this morning, out of the 122 congregations in our denomination, there are 35, another answer to the question, there are 35 vacancies. In addition to these vacancies, there are 20

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to 25 congregations whose minister will likely retire in the next 10 years. Which means that as a denomination, as the Free Church of Scotland, we need about 70 men applying for the ministry over the next 10 years. And as I said, that's even without considering all the church planting that's going on.
That we need to plant more churches in Scotland because we need more churches. Scotland needs more churches. It needs, Scotland needs the gospel as a secular nation. And as Jesus, the good shepherd, as he reminded us this morning, when Jesus looked at the multitudes, when Jesus looked around him, to those who were in front of him, he cared about them. He had compassion towards them, and he had a concern for them. He could see that there were so many lost sheep without a shepherd.
[6:06] He could see that so many people were harassed and helpless. He could see so many people wandering in this world like sheep without a shepherd. And as Jesus said, they're everywhere. They're absolutely everywhere. They're in every city, every town, every village, and in every nation of this world.

Which is why we not only need the compassion of the shepherd, we also need to hear the call of the shepherd. Because as Jesus explained, the harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few.
We need to look around and see that the fields are white. They're full. They're flourishing. They're ripe and ready for harvest. But there's a problem. The laborers are few. The laborers are few and far between. So Jesus says, pray. Pray earnestly that the Lord of the harvest would send out laborers into his harvest field. And you know, when we consider the number of vacancies and our vision as a church, we need to make this a matter of prayer. Not occasionally or casually, but earnestly and urgently.
Because we need to see the need. We need to see the need. We need to see the need for more laborers. And we need to see the need for the lost to be saved. Because as the good shepherd, Jesus could see the need. He looked around him. And he saw the need for more laborers.
And he saw the need for the lost to be saved. And the same is true with Paul. As a pastor with a pastor's heart, Paul saw the need. He saw the need for more laborers. And he saw the need for the lost to be saved.
[7:51] And it's this need that Paul is expressing and even explaining here. The need for more laborers and the need for the lost to be saved. That's why Paul, he begins this chapter by, you could say, he's exposing his heartfelt concern as a pastor. But he says there, verse 1, brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

My heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. You know, I believe that Paul was the kind of man who wore his heart on his sleeve. You know these kind of people.
Paul was someone who wore his heart on his sleeve. Because as a pastor, he always wanted to be open. He always wanted to be honest with people. He always wanted people to know that he had a care for them and a compassion towards them and a concern about them. He always wanted them to know that he loved them. And Paul's pastor's heart is not only evident in this letter to the Romans, but when you read through all of Paul's letters, you see that that's evident in all of his letters.
He has this pastor's heart. When he wrote to the Romans, not the Romans, the Corinthians, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, you remember the Corinthians, they were in a mess. They had made many mistakes. And yet Paul lovingly addresses them as saints in Christ. And what does he do with these Christians? He doesn't just tell them off. No, no. He points them to the cross and he reminds them of the message of Christ and him crucified.
To the Colossians, when Paul wrote to them, these Colossians who were being bombarded by false teaching and false teachers, Paul reminded them and reassured them that he was praying for them.
[9:41] Always told his people that he's praying for them. He said, since we have heard of what's going on, we have not ceased to pray for you. So he was a pastor who pointed people to the cross. He was a pastor who prayed for his people. And then when Paul wrote to the Philippians who were struggling with their assurance of salvation, he thanked them. He thanked God for them. And he assured them that the God who began a good work in them would bring it to completion. So Paul preached to his people. He prayed for his people and he pastored his people. He wore his heart on his sleeve and he always displayed and demonstrated his pastor's heart for his people because he wanted them to be aware. He always wanted his people to be aware and be assured of how much he loved them and how much he longed for them to be saved. And that's why he's writing to the

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Romans here. He's writing to Romans here in chapter 10 and he says there, brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. Verse 2, for I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. And you know, Paul here, he's exposing and expressing and explaining to us his heartfelt concern as a pastor for the Jewish people. Because as Paul said, they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Paul in the previous chapter, he's talking about the Jews and Israel and all that. And now he's coming to the climax of it and he's describing the Jews and he's saying about them, they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. In other words, they think that their godly worship and their good works, that that will make them acceptable before a holy God. But Paul says that they are, he goes on, you follow it through in Paul's train of thought, he goes on to say they are completely ignorant. Very strong word. Completely ignorant of God's righteousness. Because they think that if they do enough, then they'll be good enough and worthy enough to be made righteous before a holy God and then received by God. That's what he says in verse 3.

For being ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to God's righteousness. So they're ignorant of what God has provided for them and they want to do it themselves. They want to establish their own righteousness so they will not submit to God's righteousness. So Paul here, he's expressing his heartfelt concern as a pastor for the Jewish people. Because his heart's desire, as he says there, his heart's desire and his prayer to God for them is that they'll be saved. And he's pleading with them. But they ignorantly think that they can be made righteous before a holy God by their godly worship and their good works. They want to establish their own righteousness by what they do, rather than receiving Christ as their righteousness.

And so they're ignorant, they ignorantly think that salvation is a goal to be achieved rather than a gift to be received. That's what Paul is saying here. My heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they'll be saved. But they are ignorantly thinking that their salvation is a goal to be achieved rather than a gift to be received. Now, as you know, it's not just Jewish people who think like that, is it?

Because I would say that most people in our community who are not Christians might think like that. That salvation is a goal to be achieved rather than a gift to be received.

And some would even think that it's their godly worship and their good works and being a good person, that that's going to make them good enough and worthy enough and fit enough to be made righteous before God and received by God. And they want to, as Paul says there, they want to establish their own righteousness before a holy God, ignoring the fact that God has provided the righteousness through his own Son. So they want to establish their own righteousness rather than receiving Christ as their righteousness. But this is why Paul said from the outset of his letter to the Romans. It's amazing how you're, if you read through the book of Romans, you're just following Paul's train of thought. And from the very outset of his letter, from the beginning of his letter, Paul says to the Romans that he is eager to preach the gospel to them. Why? Because they need the gospel.

[14:42] They need the gospel. Whether they're a Jew or a Gentile, they need the gospel. They need the good news of Jesus Christ. Why? Because the gospel, as Paul says in Romans 1, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe. And as Paul explains later in this chapter, when you follow his train of thought all the way through the chapter, what he says later, and you know, my unconverted friend, whether you're here or at home tonight, you need to listen to this. You really need to listen to this.

You need to take it in and take it to heart because as a concerned pastor, Paul says that the only way to be saved, the only way to be saved, as Paul says, verse 9, is by believing in your heart and confessing with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord. That's an answer to another question, by the way.

The only way to be saved is by believing in your heart and confessing with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord. Verse 10, for with the heart, he says, one believes and is made righteous or is justified.

So the only way you can be made righteous is not by establishing your own righteousness. The only way you can be made righteous is by believing in your heart and with your mouth confessing and you're saved. So with the heart one believes and is justified. With the mouth one confesses and is saved. So Paul the pastor, he's clear. Absolutely clear. Categorically clear. The only way to be

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made righteous is by believing in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. It's not by godly worship. It's not by good works. It's not by being a good person. It's Jesus Christ alone. Therefore, the only way to be saved is by confessing with your mouth. It has to come from your mouth.
It has to come from your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ is Lord. My friend, you must believe and you must confess. But maybe for all of you here this evening and maybe some of you at home, believing isn't the issue. You already believe. That's why you're here. You already believe that Jesus Christ is the only savior of sinners. She's the one who was crucified on a Roman cross. [17:14] He was buried in a borrowed grave and he rose triumphant on the Lord's day. You believe all that. James tells us that even the devils believe and they shudder. So you're on the same par as the devil.

They believe too. But in order to be saved, this is the point. This is what Paul is saying here as a pastor. You must confess with your mouth. That's the difference. It must come out of your own mouth.
Jesus Christ is my Lord and my savior. You must confess it openly and audibly. Jesus Christ is my Lord and my savior. And you know, Paul's pastoral concern was that his congregation would make this personal confession of faith in Jesus Christ. That's his heart's desire. That's his prayer to God. That's what he prays about in prison. That's what he pleads with the Lord for, that they would be saved. And my friend, you know, Paul had such a pastoral care and a pastoral concern for these people whom the Lord had entrusted to his care. He cared for them. He had a concern for them. And you know, I look at Paul's pastoral heart and I can understand what Paul is saying here. I can appreciate the love that he has towards his congregation. I can empathize with the care and the compassion and the concern that he has for their soul and their spiritual well-being. And I know what he's talking about when he says that his heart's desire above everything else, his prayer to God that is the priority of his ministry is that they would be saved. And you know, I understand what Paul is saying here because when you have invested so much of yourself into people, you have such a personal and a pastoral concern for the souls of your congregation. You care for them. You love them. You long for them to be saved.
And you know, my friend, I don't want you to reject the gospel. I don't want you to be lost. I don't want you to die without Christ. I would preach to your dying breath if I knew you would be saved with that breath. I don't want any of you to go to hell. As Paul says here, I want you to be saved. To come to a saving knowledge of the truth.
[19:55] My, I can say with Paul, wholeheartedly, my heart's desire and prayer to God is that you, you will be saved.

But my heart's desire and my prayer is not enough. Because I can't save you.
You and I both know that. I can't save you. As much as I would love to pluck you as a brand from the burning and carry you into the kingdom of God itself, I cannot save you. You need to see your need to be saved. That's what Paul is saying here. You need to see your need to be saved. You need to see that the only way to be saved is that by believing in your heart, you confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is your Lord and your Savior. You need to see your need to be saved. Because I can't save you.
And so as Paul here, as he exposes and explains and even expresses his pastor's heart, he draws attention, first of all, to the pastoral concern or the pastor's concern. But then secondly, he speaks about the pastor's call. So the pastor's concern, he wants people saved. But then he talks about the pastor's call. Look at verse 13. He says, everyone who calls in the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news. I mentioned earlier that next to the Bible, the best book that I've ever read is this book, the book that changed my life by Derek Prime and Alistair Begg on being a pastor. As I mentioned, the first chapter in the book is about the call and the calling. It was a great help to me when I was confused about this call. But it's only when I opened the book the other day when preparing for this evening, I reread the foreword or the preface to the book. And the foreword or preface, it's written by Al Mola. And Al Mola, he's the president of the Southern Baptist Seminary in the
[22:30] United States. But in this preface, Al Mola gives, you could say, he gives a glimpse into what it's like to be a pastor. And I want to share it with you. He writes, the Christian pastor holds the

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greatest office of human responsibility in all creation. He is called to preach the word, to teach the truth to God's people, to lead God's people in worship, to tend the flock as a caring shepherd, and to mobilize the church for Christian witness and service. The pastor's role also includes an entire complex of administrative and leadership tasks. Souls are entrusted to his care. The truth is entrusted to his stewardship. And eternal realities hang in the balance. Then he asks, who can fulfill this job description? That's, I read it and I thought, who can? Which he writes in response, he says, of course, the answer is that no man can fulfill this calling. The Christian pastor must continually acknowledge his absolute dependence upon the grace and mercy of God. As the Apostle Paul instructs us, we are but earthen vessels employed for God's glory. On his own, no man is up to this task. Which is the very reason why Paul asks all these rhetorical questions in verses 14 and 15? Everyone who calls in the name of the Lord will be saved, he says, how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? Paul sees that the need is great, and the task is even greater. The need is great, and the task is even greater. But as you all know, the best of men, they're only men at best. The best of men are only men at best, which is why they need to be, another answer, they need to be divinely called into the ministry. Because the pastoral ministry, it's not a job. It's a calling. If it was a job, I would have walked away years ago.

But it's a calling. And Paul emphasizes that it is a calling, because when you read the original language of these verses, Paul uses in verse 15 the word sent. And that word sent, how are they to preach unless they are sent? Paul is emphasizing there that it's a divine sending. It's God who does the sending. It's God who calls men into ministry. And the amazing thing is, and I learned this a long time ago before I even started, God doesn't call the equipped. He equips those whom he calls. God doesn't call the equipped. He equips those whom he calls. And when it comes to God's call, and this is part of the book, it's in the first chapter, it's an irresistible call. Just like the call to salvation, it's an irresistible call. And so when you're called into ministry, it's an irresistible call. The advice that's often given of someone who feels called into ministry, the advice that's often given is, if you can avoid entering the ministry, do so. If you can do something else, do it. If you can avoid entering the ministry, do so. If you can do something else, do it. And you know, it's good advice. Because if you weren't called into the ministry, you wouldn't keep going in the ministry. You'd walk away. You'd give up. You'd have enough. But the call is not only an irresistible call. It's an internal call. With the Holy Spirit, he impresses upon you this internal desire, this internal drawing towards ministry, where there's this desire to preach. There's this desire to pastor. There's this desire to see, as Paul says there in verse 1, the desire and prayer to God that people will be saved. There's this drawing, this desire growing all the time, even to study God's word. But the irresistible call and the eternal call, it's not enough. Because it's not enough to feel called or think you're called or even want to be called into the ministry. The call has to be confirmed. And it has to be confirmed by the church. The church have to see the gifts that you have. The church even has to confirm the call by an external call. So the irresistible and internal call has to be confirmed by an external call by the church. And as Derek Prime and Aus the Beggers, they write, this is what they write in that chapter, the confirmation of the call to the ministry is of vital importance. It's not enough to feel that we may possibly have a call to the ministry.

Such uncertainty leads to tragic mistakes. I always remember the late Professor Donald MacLeod, and he was saying to us in practical theology, he told us that your calling into ministry is not confirmed until a congregation signs a call for you. Your calling into ministry is not confirmed until a congregation signs a call for you. And the amazing thing about Professor Donald MacLeod was, by that point, he had never actually preached. Before he was called to his first charge, I think it was Kilmally, he had never actually preached. And yet a congregation called him. And that confirmed his calling into ministry. So your calling into ministry is not confirmed until a congregation actually calls you. But the problem we have is that not enough men are being called into the pastoral ministry. So what do we do? What do we do? Do we follow the lead of the national church and open it up to women? Do we increase the stipend to make it more attractive and more lucrative in a career path? [28:59] Do we accept everyone and anyone into the ministry regardless of a divine call? Of course we don't. So what do we do? What do we do in a day of small things? What do we do when there's a lack of laborers? What do we do about this great problem that is facing our denomination?

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Well, our Bible instructs us not to despise the day of small things. And Jesus has already told us this morning what we are to do with the lack of laborers. We're to pray. We're to pray.
Jesus said that the answer to the problem is pray. The one who's going to hear our prayers is asking us to pray. And he's saying pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest, to me. Pray earnestly to me to send out laborers into his harvest. But you know, what puts people off even praying about the possibility of being called into the pastoral ministry? I remember as a young man being told that every young man should ask the Lord, am I being called into ministry? Every man should ask the Lord, what do you want me to do?
Every man should make himself available and say like Isaiah, here I am. Send me. But what puts people off even praying about that? Even praying about the possibility of being called into the pastoral ministry? You know, when the board of ministry gave this presentation to Presbytery last month, they asked that very question, what puts people off? What puts people off entering the ministry?
And the top reason was finance. Very valid reason. The fear of not having financial stability and security. But you know, I can speak from experience and many other ministers can. Many ministers will tell you many stories. But I have to say that the fear of less finance is a lack of faith. The fear of less finance is a lack of faith. Because finance was my greatest fear. Especially giving up a full-time job and becoming a student. There was lack of faith on my part. But the Lord was faithful. Why? Because they didn't lack anything. In fact, I had more money in my years as a student than I ever did as an electrician.
[31:29] Which is, I would say, it's hard to believe. But it's the truth. That's obviously not the case now. You don't go into ministry for the money. But as my good friend J.C. Ryle once said, and it's written on a plaque in the manse. And I think it just summarizes what ministry is all about.

One single soul saved shall outlive and outweigh all the kingdoms of this world.
And you know, my friend, when you have a pastor's heart, with a pastor's concern for people to be saved. And this pastor's call upon your life. When your heart's desire and prayer to God is that people will be saved, you're not in the ministry for the money. You're in ministry for God to be glorified.
For Christ to be exalted. For the Lord's people to be built up. And the lost sheep to be brought in. That's why you're in ministry. That's why the Lord calls you into ministry.
And so on this ministry Sunday, how are we going to respond to God's word today? We've heard God's word both morning and evening. How are we going to respond to God's word? Because as James tells us, we can't just be hearers of God's word. We must be doers.
[32:58] How are we going to respond? Well, I'm going to stop talking and leave the last word to Rico Tice. Rico Tice, as you know, he's the face of Christianity explored.

He's the author of a great book called Honest Evangelism. And this is what he said about our subject for today. There is great urgency.
There are sheep without a shepherd. Unprotected from death. Let's pray. And there is great opportunity. There is a harvest waiting to be brought in.
If only there are harvesters to do it. And what does he say? Let's pray. Friends, let's pray.
May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let's pray. O Lord, our gracious God, our plea this evening is that thou wouldest use us for thine own glory, that we would see that our life is not about ourselves, that man's chief end is not to glorify self, but to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.
[34:15] And Lord, help us, we pray, to live life singing with the psalmist. Not unto us, Lord, not to us, but do thou glory take unto thy name in for thy truth and for thy mercy's sake.

And Lord, that we would have this great burden for more men to be called into ministry, for more people to hear the call, to put their hand to the plough and not turn back.
And Lord, we know that thou art the God who is able to do the impossible, the God who is able to do in us and for us more than we could ask or even think. And so, Lord, our plea is tonight that thou wouldest hear our prayers, that thou, the Lord of the harvest, that thou wouldest thrust out laborers into this great harvest field, that more and more would sow in tears that they might reap in joy.
Lord, go before us and we pray. Bless us in the week that lies ahead, a week that is always unknown to us. But Lord, we commit and we commend ourselves once again into the hands of this shepherd who has loved us and who gave himself for us.
Do us good and we pray. Cleanse us, we ask, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening.

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[35:39] We're going to sing in Psalm 126. Psalm 126, page 419 in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 126.

As we said, all of our psalms, they focus upon the theme of preaching. Psalm 19, God the Father is preaching. He's declaring and proclaiming His glory through creation.
Psalm 40, God the Son is preaching. He's preaching His righteousness. And I was thinking, well, Psalm 126. God the Spirit is preaching. As the sower sows, it's the Spirit that is working.
The Spirit is making the seed effective in the soil. And that's our longing. And as he says there in verse 6, that man who bearing precious seed in going forth doth mourn, he doubtless.
Why is he doubtless? Because it's a work of the Spirit. He doubtless bringing back his sheaves, rejoicing, shall return. So Psalm 126, we're going to sing the whole psalm to God's praise.
[37:02] When Zion's bondage go turn back, as men that dream were we, then filled with laughter was our heart, our tongue with melody.

The Lord has done great things for us, whence joy to us is brought.
As streams of water in the south, our bondage guard we call, who so in tears shall we be time, of joy and joy they shall.
That man who bearing precious seed in going forth doth mourn, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves, rejoice and shall return.
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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