

## My Heart's Desire

✠ **Passion for souls** (vv.1-4a)

✠ **Praise for Christ** (vv.4b-5)

In the name of Jesus, our priceless Treasure, dear loved ones in Christ:

This summer there's a world of examples for heartfelt passion. No matter your country, if you compete in the London Olympics, you have passion for your sport whether you win a medal or not. Still, some athletes don't try their best. Eight female badminton players were expelled for trying to lose early matches to get better matchups in later rounds. Some are calling these the "Grifters' Games" for scandals in boxing, fencing, gymnastics, Judo, sailing, soccer, weightlifting. After one Chinese diver won her gold medal, someone reported her grandmother died a year ago and her mother has battled breast cancer for eight years. No one told the young athlete named Wu. They thought it might distract her passion.<sup>1</sup>

The Apostle Paul had real passion for sports too. He traveled near the early Olympic Games in Greece. Paul laced athletic terms from boxing and running in this famous passage? ***"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."*** (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NIV84) But athletics was nothing compared to his **Heart's Desire**. That Paul would say was his...

✠ **Passion for souls** (vv.1-4a)

If you've been running through Romans with us in Bible Class, we're reaching the mountain peaks of Paul's passion for the Gospel. He laid down the need for Jews and Gentiles in Chapters 1-3; racing to objective justification by faith alone in Chapters 3 and 4. Now we're ready to dive into peace and joy that permeates God's eternal love for us. Like athletes in training, we rejoice in our sufferings. God uses them to produce ***"perseverance...character...and hope [that] does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."*** (5:1-5) Baptism in Chapter 6 gives us over to God's righteousness. Under grace we triumph in our faith struggles through God's inseparable love. He makes us ***"more than conquerors"*** through Christ. (Romans 7, 8)

It's a shocking transition from "the Great Victory Chapter," Romans 8, into Chapter 9. It feels like a sport I believe no one should have invented. I mean, who figured out how long to make the rope? How many died trying to get the stretchiness right? If your bungee cord is too long, you don't live to tell about it. If it breaks, you can end up like one young woman bungee jumping in Africa. None of the crocodiles in the river got her, but water is awfully hard at high speeds. Her survival was a miracle.

What fuels Paul's **Passion for souls** in Romans 9-11, is that no one can survive this plunge. Paul knew that he had reached the end of his rope. God was merciful to short it. God did not let Paul go too long. Remember how passionately he hated Christ? How Paul persecuted Christians? What ripped him out of his headlong plunge to hell was Christ appearing to him on the road to Damascus.

Paul never forgot God's mercy on him. Christ convinced him that without faith in forgiveness no one can escape God's wrath. Now Christ's **Passion for souls** permeates Paul's confession: ***"I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for***

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.slate.com/blogs/five\\_ring\\_circus/2012/08/02/badminton\\_scandal...london\\_games.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/five_ring_circus/2012/08/02/badminton_scandal...london_games.html)

*the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.”* (Romans 9:1–4a NIV84) He would rather lose heaven itself than have his fellow Jews miss out on their own Messiah.

Just as no one can take an athlete’s place in training, no sinful mortal could swim the fiery lake of burning sulfur for someone else. But Jesus is no sinful mortal – mortal, but not sinful. The eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ took our place under God’s wrath. He suffered the full punishment for all sin, including our careless attitude toward souls. Our Savior’s blood cleansed away every guilty stain; not one remains. God raised Jesus from the dead to shout out His forgiveness full and free. That’s love on steroids, jet fuel of **Passion for souls**. God is so passionate to forgive sin that He sent His Son to wash it away with His innocent blood. Olympics end, and so does life’s little day. Judgment Day is fast approaching, but Christ’s pain is our gain in joyful **Passion for souls**. God’s eternal love sets us to cheering in unending...

### ✠ Praise for Christ (vv.4b-5)

What’s behind the scandals at this year’s “Grifter Games”? Is one simple human trait? Everyone wants the advantage. Some go after it by disciplined training and diet. Others cheat by drugs or default for a better spot in matches and medals. But who wants a cheating hero? Or such a fellow athlete?

“But the Jews weren’t cheating!” Paul shouts here. God gave His chosen people advantages like a smaller court to defend, a larger racket to swing, winning points on the scoreboard before the match began. In theological terms Paul says, *“Theirs is the adoption as sons”* – God’s own people by His gracious choice. *“Theirs the divine glory”* – which they could see when God came down on Mount Sinai and experience in the sacrifices pointing to Christ in their temple. *“The covenants”* – both the Old Covenant showing their sin and the New Covenant showing our Savior. *“The receiving of the law”* – beyond any Supreme Court disappointment, Israel got her laws directly from God along with His interpretation. *“The temple worship”* – I wish we had more time to study the intricate pictures of God’s love in Christ and heaven. *“And the promises”* – which only God could make to save our souls and only God could fulfill in making it all happen according to His plan and His timing.

But the Jews had more, as Paul says, *“Theirs are the patriarchs”* – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – grandfathers of all believers. *“And from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ,”* the Messiah, *“who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.”* Yes, Jesus was a Jew. And, yes, His family tree has roots on earth and in heaven. God eternal is His Father; the virgin Mary His mother. No other Savior could keep God’s law perfectly in our place or die the death we deserved to pay our debt to God. When you trust all this is true for you, you can’t stop giving **Praise for Christ**. If only everyone would!

Paul wraps up like this: *“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”* (10:1–4 NIV84)

Earthly scholastics and athletics can give you bad dreams. A cruel professor’s tests or that football game that just didn’t go as planned. Once a blocked pass dropped right into my hands. One man to beat, the quarterback. But then like a dream in slow motion, my legs would barely budge. We got the ball, but I don’t remember scoring. Now I can’t wait for heaven to see what kind of games God has for us. Gravity gone, glorified bodies beyond fatigue, celestial sports will make our Olympic games look like Fischer Price. When at last the surprising grace of God comes to full fruition, scandal is spurned, weakness is a world away, righteousness and peace get the gold. *“The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”* (Isaiah 35:10; 51:11 NIV84) May Christ’s **Passion** that became Paul’s **Passion** fill our hearts with a burning **Passion for souls** and overflow our lips and lives in **Praise for Christ**. Greater than gold, let each of us claim this prize: **My Heart’s Desire**. Amen.