

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MAY 15TH-16TH, 2021 // BOOK OF ROMANS

WHAT ABOUT ISRAEL? (ROMANS 9:1-5)

Paul has just finished chapter 8 declaring the security and assurance we have in Christ.

- God will complete His purposes in the lives of those who are "called" (8:28).
- Paul hears an objection- "What about the Jews? They were chosen by God, yet them seem to have fallen away because they rejected Jesus!"
- Why did the Jews reject Jesus? If God failed with them, how do we know He won't fail with us also?

Verses 1-2 make clear that for Paul, this is not an academic or philosophical question.

- The fact that the Jewish nation had rejected Jesus their Messiah caused him, "great sorrow & unceasing anguish" (vs. 2). The Jews were without a doubt Paul's biggest opponents in ministry and yet his heart was broken for them to know Jesus.
- Could the same be said of us?

Paul is so burdened for his Jewish kinsman that if he could, he would gladly give up all his privileges of salvation and go to hell if that meant his countrymen could be saved! (vs. 3)

- Paul's heart ached and was burdened for those far from Jesus and he'd given his life to see people saved. What sacrifices are we willing to make to see others come to know Jesus?

In verses 4-5 Paul acknowledges the fact that Israel should have believed because of the spiritual privileges they had that no other nation possessed.

- They had the "adoption" as sons through the Exodus; the "glory", the physical manifestation of God in their midst; "the covenants" & "promises"; the "giving of the law"; and the "worship", the temple was the place of God's presence.

The Jews had the "patriarchs", Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob and the testimonies of God's faithfulness in their lives. From their "race", Jesus was born, who is "God over all" (vs. 5). So what happened? How is this not a failure of God's purposes? How can we be sure that God will do any better with us?

JACOB HAVE I LOVED (ROMANS 9:6-13)

God did not fail! Why? Because not all "who descended from Israel belong to Israel" (vs. 6).

- One meaning of the name "Israel" is "governed by God"- so not every ethnic Jew is governed by God (vs. 7). Not every person who wears the title "Christian" is truly a follower of Christ- that doesn't mean that Jesus failed. Truly being "of Israel" is not about ethnic identity.

Truly being "of Israel" has always been about trusting in God's promises in the inward heart.

- God's word didn't fail, because God still has His "children of promise", which may or may not be ethnically Jewish (vs. 8). Abraham's son Isaac was a child that came to him by supernatural means, & his son Ishmael, "according to the flesh" (vs. 9).
- Inclusion in God's family happens via supernatural means as, "children of the promise".

Within ethnic Israel, there were those who had heart-level faith in God as "children of the promise", and there were those who didn't as "children of the flesh"- Jewish by race only.

- The patriarch Isaac had two sons through his wife Rebekah (vs. 10)- one was named Jacob, and one was named Esau. Jacob was a liar, a cheat, and a swindler- but nevertheless he embraced God's promises (Gen. 28).

Esau traded his birthright (his stake in God's promises) for a bowl of soup (Gen. 25).

- The writer of Hebrews tells us that Esau represents those who inwardly trade obedience to God's promise for indulging the lusts of our flesh.
- God chose-before either of them were born and had done "nothing either good or bad"- Jacob to be the heir of God's covenant of salvation instead of Esau (vs. 11).

Paul is explaining that these two types of people (the children of promise and the children of the flesh) have always existed in Israel.

- God never truly had a relationship with the Esaus, so you can't say that Jews' rejection of Jesus is evidence that God somehow failed and lost his sons and daughters that he foreknew and predestined. God never knew them (Matt. 7:21-23).

God chose Jacob, "in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of Him who calls" (vs. 11).

- God announced these intentions to Rebekah before the children were born as she was told, "The older will serve the younger", and God repeated this verdict in the book of Malachi 1:2 long after Jacob & Esau were dead, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated" (vs. 12).

WAIT... GOD "HATES" ESAU?

The best way to interpret Scripture is through Scripture, so the verb "hate" in this context needs to be considered with other usages in Scripture. Jacob loved Rachel so that his relationship to Leah seemed like "hatred" (Gen. 29:20, 30-31). Jesus called his disciples to "hate" their own family (Luke 14:26).

- The emphasis is on God's STRONG love and sovereign choice of Jacob over Esau.

The use of "hate" (miseo) is poetically comparative to show that God esteemed Jacob more than Esau in making him the heir of the covenant. Esau was a blessed man in this life (Gen. 33:8-16, 36), but God ultimately chose Jacob to be the one who inherited the covenant.

- Immediately, our minds begin to swirl with objections and questions to this idea- which is exactly what Paul answers next.

MERCY ON WHOMEVER HE WILLS (ROMANS 9:14-18)

Did God do something wrong by only showing mercy to Jacob and not to Esau? Is God unjust? By no means! (vs. 14). The very definition of mercy is when someone receives something that they didn't deserve.

- Mercy is not something that any human being is owed or entitled to- if God gave us what we were owed, we'd all be in hell!

If God doesn't owe any person on planet earth mercy, then none of us can say it's unfair for God not to show it to some. And if He owes no one salvation, then He's free to give it whomever He chooses and He's free to withhold it from whomever He chooses.

- God has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and compassion on whom He will have compassion (vs. 15, Ex. 33:19).

It's not that God's showing of mercy or compassion is arbitrary or random, it's just that's not due to any goodness on our end!

- God's showing of mercy and compassion towards us, "depends not on human will or exertion, but on God" (vs. 16).
- God's choice to save us has nothing to do with our inner goodness or how much we deserved it- none of us deserved it more than anyone else, and God's choice to give it was His free choice.

We're not told that God has no reasons for choosing, we're just told that the reason He chooses us is not because we're good.

- What are God's reasons in choosing some for salvation? Verse 17 suggests that God's not choosing of Pharaoh was so that through Pharaoh's resistance God could put His power and glory on display.

Sometimes God glorifies Himself through showing mercy, and sometimes God glorifies Himself through a person's hardness of heart.

- We shouldn't think of Pharaoh as a kind, good-hearted, jovial fellow that God persuaded to be hardened towards God and Israel. Actually, Pharaoh hardened His own heart 5 times (Ex. 7,8,9) before God simply delivered his heart over to pursue its natural inclination

God is at the center of the universe-not humanity.

- We're used to thinking of ourselves and our own interests as the most important realities in the entire universe- but we're not the point, God is.
- God is after His glory and the exaltation of His glory as the greatest good in the entire universe!
- So God's glory is the reason behind why God shows mercy to some and doesn't show it others (vs. 18).

POTTER AND CLAY (ROMANS 9:19-33)

Some of us may say, "if God is one who is in control of who hears and believes, how can He condemn anyone to hell if they're simply playing the role He's assigned to play?" (vs. 19).

- Think back to God's rejection of Pharaoh- it was consistent with Pharaoh's rejection of God. Did Pharaoh reject God or did God reject Pharaoh?
- God is not to blame for Pharaoh's hardened heart; Pharaoh is.

In the same way, Jesus lamented over Jerusalem's rejection of Him as messiah- "...how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks,...but you WERE NOT WILLING" (Matt. 23:37).

- God's rejection of anyone in salvation is always consistent with their rejection of Him.

Ultimately, Paul says our fault-finding with God is a sign of irreverence and disrespect (vs. 20-21).

- If God says that He chooses us, but at the same time we are responsible in choosing Him, who are we to question Him?
- Doesn't God have the same right that any Creator has over His creation, like a potter does to clay?
- Even when we can't understand His ways, faith is accepting that He's God and we're not.

Doesn't God have the right to glorify Himself as He sees fit (vs. 22-24)?

- If God chooses to glorify Himself through letting some people go their own way and letting them righteously receive His wrath, doesn't He have the right to do so?
- And if God chooses to glorify Himself by showing mercy to whomever He wants to, who can oppose Him and find fault with Him?

Paul then quotes the prophet Hosea who declares God's right to choose, calling those who previously were not called His people (vs. 25-26).

- When Israel rejected Jesus, it actually served a larger, better purpose in that the gospel message was extended to the Gentiles. The prophet Isaiah declared God's right to choose to save a remnant (vs. 27-29), and God was not unjust to do so.

Ultimately, Paul's emphasis is not on Israel rejecting Jesus because God appointed it- it is that Israel missed the Messiah because they refused to come by faith (vs. 31-32).

- Israel rejected Jesus because they wouldn't humble themselves and accept the gospel.
- They stumbled over the "rock of offense" that is the gospel message (vs. 33)- the same message that makes the gospel offensive even today.

The offense of the gospel is this- many are simply unwilling to admit their own need for God's scandalous, unmerited, undeserved, and extravagant mercy and grace.

- Many are unwilling to say to God, "Unless you show me mercy for reasons that have nothing to do with my own personal goodness, I can never be saved". God's rejection of anyone in salvation is always consistent with their rejection of Him- and anyone who calls upon Lord will be saved! (Rom. 10:13)

THE TENSION IS GOOD

The tension that exists between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility is this text is needed and is only contradictory if viewed from a human perspective. If we are saved because of what we do to earn it through our own virtue, then God loses His sovereign power and divine initiative as the author of salvation, and we should feel exceptional superiority or despair. If our choices and human responsibility don't matter in the least bit, then we lose all sense of accountability and become mere pawns in a game of cosmic fatalism. Ultimately, God is completely sovereign in choosing us AND we are responsible in responding to Him, obeying Him, and following Him as disciples of Jesus.

HOW DOES THIS CHAPTER HELP ME IN THE LEAST BIT?

It helps ask whether or not we truly see ourselves as unworthy of God's mercy. It helps destroy any inking of pride within us. It helps us manage the tension- trust in God's sovereignty but actively obey His commands!

It helps us to share or receive the Gospel trusting in God's sovereignty and perfect plan. It helps us ask if we are truly children of promise.