

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 9, Verses 25-33
Notes from Tuesday January 25, 2011
Last Revised on January 26, 2011

Songs

Opening Prayer

Introduction

This evening we continue our study of the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Last week we read Verses 14 - 24 of Chapter 9

and tonight we will finish Chapter 9

But first let's review.

Review

As we have repeatedly reminded ourselves,

the **overall** theme of Paul's letter to the Romans is ... the **gospel**,

which as Paul reminds his readers, in the first four verses of the letter,

is God's good news concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,

who was descended from **David** according to the flesh,

and declared to be the Son of God in power,

by his resurrection from the dead.

Paul reminds us that all of this happened in fulfillment of what God promised beforehand,

through his **prophets** in the **holy Scriptures**.

This gospel is, Paul says in Chapter 1, Verse 16,

the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,

to the Jew **first** and also to the Greek.

Paul goes on to explain

how **everyone** who has ever lived,

including **even** the most law abiding Jews,

even David ... even Moses ... even Abraham,

has been ungodly and unrighteous,

deserving only death.

Therefore nobody,

not **even** the most law abiding Jews,

and certainly none of us,

ever has been or ever will be saved from sin and death,

except by the **mercy** and the **grace** of God.

The good news is that God **is** merciful and gracious.

This is true of God eternally. Fundamentally!

Abraham knew this. Moses knew this. David knew this.

Many other heroes of faith of which we read in the Old Testament knew this.

They put their faith in God's goodness and mercy, and in this alone!

And their faith saved them.

In the fullness of time, God's goodness and mercy were ultimately and fully displayed on the cross,

where the Son of God (the Messiah of Israel) was put forward as the propitiation for sin.

Everyone who believes God and accepts the salvation which God freely offers in Christ is saved.

This is the gist of the first **four** Chapters of Romans.

Chapters 5-8, then, go on to discuss some of the implications of our salvation.

Paul describes this marvelous peace with God which we now have through Christ.

Christ has **more** than overcome the estrangement with God which followed the fall of Man in Adam.

All of our sins (past, present, and future) have been completely forgiven, because of Christ.

And even so, this does not encourage us to to sin.

but on the contrary, such forgiveness makes it possible for us to **stop** sinning.

Because once we are reconciled with Him, God, the Holy Spirit, comes to live in us,

leading us to live according to the Spirit, rather than according to sinful flesh.

Life lived according to the Spirit may be **characterized** by **suffering**, after the example of Christ.,

but such suffering is as **nothing** compared to the glory to be revealed in us,

and in all **creation** because of us,

we who are **children** of God, and **brothers** of the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

We wait patiently and confidently for the end of this age

and for the final coming of Christ and His Kingdom,

when all things will be made new!

So ends Chapter 8, on a mighty triumphant note,

which I read from verses 37-39:

(Romans 8:37-39)

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

At the start of Chapter 9, Paul turns his attention to his fellow Jews,

and to the sad fact that most of them had not yet been reconciled with God.

But Paul goes on to explain that this sad and deeply troubling fact,

that most Jews had violently rejected the Son of God, and continued to do so,

was fully consistent with the history of Israel, and with God's eternal plan.

God's relationship with Israel, had always been one in which the people fell away, and fell away, and fell away from God, while God mercifully preserved his relationship with a small remnant.

That God has worked in one way thorough the narrow line that descends through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and onward through successive generations to the Hose of David and finally the Messiah,

necessarily means that God has not worked in that same way through Ishmael, Esau, the countless other descendants of Abraham,

who had, as it were, lived their lives on the periphery of Biblical history, or beyond its boundaries.

This is not a question of the merit or demerit of particular men,

The human characters that figure prominently in the Bible stories are **not better** than other men.

It is best to get this straight!

The Bible is the story of **God's** mercy and grace as manifested ultimately in Christ.

This is the gist of the first 13 verses of Chapter 9, which we read two weeks ago, and reviewed again rather extensively last week.

Now, if indeed the different roles that men play in human history are assigned to them by God's freedom and not through human merit,

and grace requires this!

then some may see this as being rather troubling, arbitrary, or unfair,

and perhaps some might even accuse God of being unjust,

but this is just about the last thing we can accuse God of!

and Paul is having none of that!

In Verses 14 and 15 Paul anticipates this complaint against God and turns it aside.

Verses 14 and 15 read

(Romans 9:14-15)

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

Here, as we discussed last week, Paul is looking back to the story of the Golden Calf,

which perhaps more than any other single event in the history of Israel,

serves to demonstrate their characteristic unworthiness.

They had just been miraculously delivered out of slavery in Egypt,

and pledged their complete and undying loyalty to God,

and then, while Moses is up on the mountain actually speaking with God,

the people proceed to fashion for themselves a Golden Calf,

and engage in idolatry.

Justice --- which is what is under consideration here --- God's justice --- would have been satisfied with the complete destruction of Israel, and the rest of the world with it.

Yet what God did instead, repeatedly was to show mercy and compassion to Israel and the world.

He said to Moses, in effect, I am compassionate and merciful by nature,

and perfectly free to show mercy and compassion however I will.

And this is certainly true. Isn't it?!

So far as I can tell, everything that God has ever done from the beginning of the universe until now was a matter of showing mercy and compassion far beyond any one's sense of what justice would have required.

Everything that happens is an outworking of God's mercy.

This is seen ultimately on the cross, which is God's way around the death which we all so justly deserve.

There, on the cross, he can demonstrate at once, his perfect mercy and perfect justice and pour out his wrath on all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

Paul continues this thought in verses 16-18

(Romans 9: 16-18)

So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

God's mercy manifests itself ultimately in Christ,

and differently in and through the life of each man.

In one way in the life of Moses and the Nation of Israel.

In another way in the life of Pharaoh and the Nation of Egypt.

Yet always in service to God's larger purpose which is essentially merciful and gracious,

and displayed ultimately and most clearly and fully on the cross at Calvary,

which is the goal and purpose of all human history.

Christ is the reason why Paul is considering and speaking of Moses and the history of Israel,

and, in turn, why he is considering and speaking of Pharaoh and the history of Egypt,

all of these draw their only significance from the light of Christ!

God assigned to each of them a part in the history of salvation leading to Christ.

The way in which individual people have respond to God,

has been and is also mysteriously governed by God,

and does not arise from any human work or merit.

Moses was once essentially the same as and lived in the very house of Pharaoh,

The Apostle Paul was once Saul, a violent persecutor of the Church.

All who now truly believe God and accept the salvation found only in Christ, once did not.

Each of us knows (or should know) that his own faith was and is a pure **miracle**,

and not any meritorious act on our part.

Paul is saying nothing more or less than this in the verses we just read, I think.

But if everything is always unfolding in accordance with God's perfect plan,

if Pharaoh no less than Moses is a part of God's perfect plan,

and both of them are God's chosen instruments,

then doesn't this somehow **excuse** the sins of Pharaoh, and of all who oppose God?

Since what they are doing is, like all else, in service to God's perfect plan?

The answer, of course is "no."

We are to understand that Pharaoh is without excuse for his sins.

Just as **Moses** is without excuse for **his** sins!

 And **all** the peoples of the Nations of Egypt and Israel are without excuse for their sins.

 Just as you and I **know** (as it were, from the inside out) that we are all without excuse for our sins.

 Would any of you **excuse** yourself before God?!

 I hope NOT!

 God has given everyone freedom enough to know that we are fully responsible for our sins.

 Indeed where there is no such responsibility there can be no sin!

 Paul acknowledges this tricky problem in Verse 19 where he writes:

(Romans 9:19)

You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"

It is very interesting to see how Paul answers this timeless and difficult and ultimately inescapable question:

 We read in Verse 20

(Romans 9:20)

But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"

We are each precisely as God has made us,

 and whatever our individual gifts and endowments might be,

 and whatever our life history and present environment,

 and whatever our particular trials and temptations

 we are each **responsible** for and **guilty** of our sins against God,

 and I think it is fair to say that what God desires from each of us,

 is essentially the same thing,

and that is for us to put our trust in Him and accept the salvation he freely offers in Christ.

Not **one** of us has a right or a reason to “answer back to God”

except to say “yes God” please save me, miserable sinner that I am.

This is what all clay has in common: that it is not the potter! and can make nothing of itself!

Yet surely God, the heavenly potter, is free to make of us whatever he chooses.

And whatever he chooses to make of us will be a work of grace and mercy!

Paul says:

(Romans 9:21-24)

Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory--- even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

In case of Gentile believers in Christ,

what a wonderful miracle God had performed: it had taken even Peter and the other Apostles by surprise.

What had been, seemingly, vessels of wrath prepared long ago for destruction ... the Gentile world ... turn out to include many vessels of mercy prepared beforehand for his glory!

No less miraculous are those very pious Jews such as Paul himself, who had ridiculed and tortured the very Son of God, and Messiah of Israel, and finally killed Him and, then, persecuted his church.

These at first seemed most clearly of all to be vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, but now are seen to have been vessels of mercy prepared beforehand for his glory!

It is not difficult to understand why Paul is deeply grieved to see other deeply religious Jews, such as himself, who continue violently, but for the most part unwittingly (they know not what they do) to oppose the Living God!

And it is also easy to see why Paul has not given up on seeing more Jews and more gentiles come into the church and, indeed, why he is so active in proclaiming the Gospel of grace to both Gentiles and Jews, that some may be saved.

because the Gospel is, as Paul said from the outset of this letter to the Romans, the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Gentiles.

and what is most clear from Biblical history is that God is fabulously, **almost recklessly**, merciful.

He dove down from heaven and had himself nailed to a cross!

That is how committed our God is to mercy!

There are many vessels of mercy which God has prepared beforehand for his glory,

and all of them first appeared to us as vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.

In none of this can we find any evidence of injustice on the part of God.

On the contrary, in all of this we find evidence only of God's great mercy,

which is no less great for being surprising and creative and largely beyond our understanding.

OK. That is a very long review of material covered previously. Let's read on.

Before we do, are there any comments or questions?

n.b. There were rather many good comments and questions this evening!

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 25-29

Will someone please read Romans Chapter 9, Verses 25-29, in Japanese.

Thanks. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

25 As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'"

26 "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

27 And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons

of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved,

28 for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay."

29 And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah."

Thank you.

The point being supported here, I think, is two-fold.

We are always taken by surprise by the manner and extent of God's mercy.

The gospel is always from our perspective, literally, life from death!

But this is never a last minute thing with God,

the vessels of his mercy are prepared in advance.

even before the creation of the world.

This is a consistent teaching of the whole Bible,

Paul turns for illustration to the prophet Hosea.

Verses 25 and 26 read.

(Verses 25-26)

As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'""And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

In other words: *All is not as it seem! I am and ever shall be free to save whomever I desire to save!*

Here the prophet speaks,

prophetically in advance,

of the subsequent restoration of those who will first be cut off from Israel.

And they haven't even been cut off yet!

Paul seems (to me) to apply these verses to the Gentiles of which he has just spoken in Verse 24,

those who have now, in Christ, been incorporated among God's chosen people.

But the inclusion of Gentiles in Israel,

is a also very hopeful sign to those who once were Israel but have been cut off.

(i.e. to those to and regarding whom the prophesy was originally spoken)

Because if even Gentiles are coming into the Kingdom,

then surely there is surely still much hope for the children of Israel!

Yet, as we have seen, this hope remains under a cloud.

Verses 27-29 read:

(Verses 27-29)

And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah."

This prophesy is surely consistent with everything that has actually happened from the time of Isaiah,

until the time of Paul, when those who were called Jews had dwindled to a small remnant,

and those among the Jews, so called, who were truly Israel, consisted of just those few thousand who had acknowledged the Son of God.

So it is not surprising, as Paul has been arguing, that the Church in his day, presently consists of only a minority of the Jews,

despite the fact that even many gentiles have recently begun to pour in.

I read this, then, as Paul's hope that things will improve for his Jewish brothers, wherever they may be, who remain presently unreconciled with God.

Paul's hope concerning the future of Israel will be more fully explored in Chapters 10 and 11.

Any comments or questions before we read on?

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 9, Verses 30-33

Will someone please read Romans Chapter 9, Verses 30-33, in Japanese.

Thanks. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith;

31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.

32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,

33 as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

Thank you.

We have seen that only a small remnant of the true Israel remains visible in Paul's day,

those who have embraced the Messiah,

and that these have been joined by a significant number of gentiles.

How should we understand this rather surprising situation?

In Verse 30 Paul asks this question:

(Verse 30a)

What shall we say, then?

and he proceeds to answer himself:

(Verse 30b - 31)

[We shall say] **That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.**

He is not here referring to “all Gentiles” or to “all Jews”.

He is here referring only to those Gentiles who have believed in Christ.

and only to those Jews who have not yet believed in Christ.

The most important difference between these two groups of people,

was their faith in Christ or lack thereof.

There was another difference between these two groups,

Specifically, the Jews possessed the Law and sought to obey it,

whereas the gentiles did not possess the Law,

and so could not seek to obey it.

So why were the Gentiles saved and the Jews not?

It cannot be because the Gentiles behaved better. They did not.

It cannot be because the Gentiles knew more. They did not.

It cannot be because the Law was bad. It was and is not bad, but holy and good.

Indeed Paul has been teaching us mostly out of the holy Scripture of Israel.

So what was it then?

--

Verse 32 reads:

(Verse 32)

[Why?] Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,

It is good to pursue the law, which is itself good, as Paul has consistently maintained.

But it is only good to pursue the law by faith,

and not faith in oneself and the righteousness that one might obtain by it

but faith in God and the salvation freely offered in Christ.

It was this very Christ whom the Jews rejected,

and with him the idea of free remission of sin.

and this is where they fell down.

Verse 33 reads:

(Verse 33)

as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

So long as the Jews put their faith in their own Jewishness,

their own religion,

their own piety,

their own behavior,

or in anything else besides Christ alone,

and the Mercy and Grace of God which reposes only in Him,

they would remain outside of the true Israel,

the sole purpose of which had been to prepare the way for Christ.

Now even the gentiles are entering the kingdom of God

through simple faith in Christ.

Simple faith in Christ,

was a stumbling stone in Zion,

because it was too simple,

and it left no room at all for merit in the believers, themselves,

or in their religious status, activities, and accomplishments.

Most Jews, then and now, were and are unable to embrace this.

As are perhaps many today who call themselves Christian.

We all too easily stumble into thinking that we are important,

or that our religious status, activities and accomplishments are important,

or that our churches and their programs and purposes are important,

and in the process we lose sight of Christ,

who alone can save us.

Closing Prayer