

Romans 9

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, April 8, 2018

Good morning, everyone. I want to make a quick note before we get into our sermon about the Coffee with the Cagles on April 20th. We did this last year where we had the Meet the Pastor and had folks come over to church, from the church to our house. We want to invite anyone, specifically this time, who hasn't been over to the house before. I know quite a few who got to come last year, but if you haven't had a chance to come, it's going to be April 20th. If you're a new visitor, or if you're a regular attender who hasn't come over yet, please take an advantage to do that. We were going to call it Cupcakes with the Cagles, but we thought that might be overpromising, so we were going to call it Coffee. We did throw around the idea of a Saturday morning breakfast and call it Cagles and Bagels, but that's pushing the envelope there. That's April 20th on a Friday night, so please come if you haven't been over at the house yet. We'd love to have you.

If you would, go ahead and turn to your Bibles to the book of Romans. As you're doing that, if this is your first time with us today, we want to say a special welcome to you and let you know that we are glad you're here. It's always a privilege to have visitors with us. Also, to let you know that we're in the middle of a series in the Book of Romans that we started back in February. It's called the Book of Romans in Three Months, where we're looking at the book chapter-by-chapter, or even several chapters at a time, so you can see the flow of it.

I told the man at our Bible study on Wednesday night that you don't read the Bible one verse at a time, you read it one chapter at a time, or even several chapters at a time. We're studying it that way so you can study it like you read it, so you can look at it here like you would at home. This week we're going to study one chapter together. Next week, we're actually going to start looking at a couple of chapters at once. We'll talk about that next time. But before we get into our chapter for today, I want to start us off this way.

In his book *Miracle on the River Kwai*, the Scottish soldier Ernest Gordon told the story of the time he was captured by the Japanese in World War II and forced to work on a railroad in the jungles of Vietnam called the Death Railway, because so many men died in making it. He didn't give the numbers, but that so many men died that they called it the Death Railway.

He said at one point in the construction of this thing, a shovel went missing. They all showed up for work detail one morning, and a shovel was gone. The officer in charge demanded that it turn up or he would kill everybody there. He said if the thief didn't show up, he would murder them all. Finally, one soldier stood up and said, "I took it," and the officer beat him to death. He murdered him in front of the men.

The ironic thing about that story, the book went on to say, is that the next day the shovel turned up in a tool count. It wasn't stolen. The soldier gave his life for his friends.

I mention that story because the Bible says that our Lord Jesus did a similar thing for us on the cross. It said that He died for us. He sacrificed Himself for us. But whereas that soldier died as an

accident, Jesus died on purpose. Whereas that soldier died for a mistake, I mean the shovel didn't actually go missing, Jesus died to do the will of God.

John 3:17 says the Father sent Him, which means that He was a Man on a mission. He came under orders. Matthew 26:54 says Jesus died to fulfill Scripture, which means it was prophesied long ago. Mark 14:36 says He drank the cup that was given Him to drink. The point is Jesus' death was no mistake. It was no accident in the mind of God. He had planned this thing out long before.

I just want to give you a few more passages this morning to help you think about this, because this is so important for our chapter in Romans today. Here's a few more passages. Just get your mind around this idea of what Christ actually did on the cross.

Ephesians 1:4-5 says, "God chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us..." That word "predestined" is the Greek word *proorizō*, which means "to choose beforehand". The Bible says God chose beforehand who Jesus would die for, and He did it in love. That was His motivation in doing this. Jesus died for sinners in love.

If you think about it, there wasn't a lot going on before the foundation of the world. Amen? I mean you weren't there, I wasn't there, and that's the point. When we weren't even around, God decided to save us. Before we had done anything good or bad or whatever, He loved us.

2 Timothy 1:9 gives the same idea another way when it says, "God saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." Paul says this was granted from all eternity. He says God did this according to His own purpose, which means, again, it wasn't a mistake. God was not caught off guard by human sin. He knew what He was going to do with it all along.

Another passage, one more, and I appreciate your patience with this. I think this is good stuff. But one more that I particularly like. This one's Psalm 139:14-16. It gives this from an Old Testament perspective, and even from a creation perspective. Psalm 139 says it this way, he says,

I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were written all the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.

The Bible says God loves us in a way that no one else can, because He loved us, David says, before we were born. I mean your husband can't love you like that. Your wife can't love you like that. Your friends can't love you like that. This is something totally unique to the person of God.

I don't know what you would be thinking about in eternity past, but I'm guessing it wouldn't be me. Amen? No offense, but I probably wouldn't be thinking of you. The Bible says that's what God did. He thought about us ages ago, because He loves us. You may not know this, but the

word "love" appears almost 1,000 times in the Bible, because that's what the Bible is about. It is a love story from beginning to end. The plot line of the Bible is simple: God made man, God loved man, and man didn't love him back, so God pursued him in love.

The Book of Exodus says God loved us like a Redeemer. He marched into the slave market of sin, bought us back, He redeemed us. The book of Hosea says that He loved us. He loved Israel like a husband chasing his wayward wife. The Psalms call Him a deliverer. Hebrews calls Him a mediator. 1 John says Christ is our Advocate. 1 Peter says He is our Shepherd. He calls us and loves us like a Shepherd would. He does all this because He cares about sinners. He's been doing it since the beginning of time.

You can't really understand God if you don't get this concept. You can't really understand the Bible if you don't understand the love of God, because the book doesn't make sense. When you read the first couple of chapters, Adam and Eve mess up. You know what I would do at that point? That would be the end of the Bible, right? "Look, I gave you guys a command, you blew it. I'm going to start over with somebody else." He doesn't do that.

Let me say it this way. (I like to give you guys visual illustrations from time-to-time to keep you on your toes, so make sure you're paying attention). I have two credit cards with me up here on stage. This actually is my first TD credit card. This is my second one. Just to show you that I'm becoming Canadian, I've got my TD credit cards here. But one represents you and the other one represents Christ. One represents what you owe to God and the other one represents what he owes to God. In your credit card, we could write millions or billions or trillions of dollars, more money than you could ever pay, because you've sinned and sinned and sinned against God. You have a debt greater than you could ever pay back. On the other one, we could write, "Paid in full," or we could write, "He who had no sin," or we could say, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well-pleased."

Here's what God did in love, here's what He did with his Son: He traded cards with you. He took your debt on Himself. He punished Jesus for the wages that you owe. Why did He do that? Because He loves you. There's no other reason. Because He cares. He cares in a way that you can't even quantify.

It's been said that you can't out give God because God gave His Son, and you can't come close to that. You can't compete with that. It's been said you can't out love God because God has been loving you from before you were born, so there's no way you could out love Him either.

This is why the puritan Samuel Rutherford said, he said, "To think that you could comprehend the love of Christ is as if a child could take the globe of the world in his too short arms." He said, "The love of Christ is like a great ocean whose depths are unfathomable." Robert Murray M'Cheyne said it another way. He says, "Paul says the love of Christ passes knowledge. It's like the blue sky into which you may see clearly, but the vastness of which you cannot measure. Its depths are unfathomable. Its height has no top and its length has no bottom."

This is why there's been so many songs that are about the love of God in church history, because if you can't quite understand it, the least you can do is sing about it. We sang some of those

songs this morning. This is also why certain movements in church history, like the Great Awakening, were built around the doctrine of God's love.

If you read the sermons of men like George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley, you'll see they spoke constantly about the love of God. As they did, it turned the whole world upside down. We like to talk about the wrath of God sometimes, and we should, but the Bible focuses heavily on God's love.

It leads us to our passage for this morning, because in Romans 9, Paul tells us about the love of God. He tells us about a love that you can't fully understand, but a love that turned the world upside down. Just to build up to chapter 9, I'll give you a quick overview of the book that we've looked at so far.

In Romans 1-3, Paul says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God but are justified freely by His grace." That's Romans 1-3. Jesus swapped cards with us, He traded places with us; therefore, we are justified freely in Christ. In Romans 4-5, Paul ties this into the Old Testament. He says, "Abraham believed this and it was credited to him as righteousness. Adam didn't believe. Adam sinned and he plunged the whole human race into sin."

But you still have to fight sin. That's what Romans 6-7 is about. If you're a Christian, you still have to do battle with your flesh. You can't use Adam's sin as an excuse. But you can fight it knowing that God is still with you. That's the point of Romans 8. You fight it knowing God will give you victory.

If you look in Romans 8:28, Paul says, "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." He says in verse 29, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; these whom He called, He also justified; these whom He justified, He also glorified."

If you notice in that passage there is the word "predestined" again that we talked about earlier. Paul uses it in a very encouraging way. He says, "For those whom He predestined He conformed to the image of His Son," which means that you will be conformed to the image of His Son if you are in Christ. If you're wrestling with your sin this morning, if you're wondering when is this ever going to end, the good news is if you hold on to Christ, you will be conformed to His image, because it doesn't depend on you, it depends on God. That's the point of Romans 8.

That brings us to Romans 9, because in Romans 9, Paul takes this discussion of foreknowledge in predestination into the life of Israel. And he asks the question: what about the Jews? He says, "How does this apply to them?" Paul says, "Okay. Christians are foreknown and predestined. God causes all things to work together for their good. I get that. It says that right here. But what about Israel? Does God do all this for the Jews as He causes all things to work together for their good?"

If you remember, the Old Testament said God loves Israel. They were the apple of His eye, they were His own possession. Other passages say that God made an everlasting covenant with them, chose them out of all the earth. Paul says, "Did they lose that now? Has God abandoned them?" which is an important question. If you remember your history at this time, it looked like God abandoned the Jews. They rejected their Messiah, they put Him to death. They were trying to put the apostles to death. Paul's greatest enemies were his own people, the Jews. The question now is what does that mean for them now? Is God done with Israel?

Before we answer that, I want you to see how Paul wrestles with this in the first part of the chapter. If you read Romans 9:1-5 and just hear his heart for this, he says,

1 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, 5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Paul says, "I have great sorrow in my heart. I wish I could be separated from Christ for Israel." He just said in Romans 8:39, if you look above that, he says, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God," and now he says, "I wish I could be separated for them, for the Jews." Paul didn't really want that. This is an emotional statement made for effect. But he says, in a sense, in a figurative way, "I love these people enough to go to hell for them. I love these people enough to die for them." That's what he was doing. He was dying for the Jews in a sense.

I want to stop here for a moment and just get your heart around this and your mind around this, and ask the question, do you ever talk like this about people in your life? I mean do you ever say, "I wish I could go to hell for someone," not literally but just in your heart, out of your guts? I told you the statistic last time we were in Romans that something like 95% of Christians have never led someone to the Lord, and one out of five never pray for them. I mean is that you this morning? Do you ever pray for the lost in your life?

See, Paul was heartbroken over Israel. He hated what they have become. Some commentators say this is an interesting point, that Paul could have skipped over all this stuff in Romans 9-11 and gone straight to chapter 12 and never missed a beat. As a matter of fact, if you read Romans 8:39 and then you read Romans 12:1, they make perfect sense. Paul says, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," and if you look in 12:1, he says, "Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice." I mean he could've skipped over this stuff. It's very simple to do. But it's almost like he couldn't let go of Israel. He couldn't let go of his people. I hope you can relate to that this morning.

We're going to dive into some deep waters here today. I hope you brought your scuba gear. This is some deep theology, some tough stuff, but I hope you can feel his heart in writing this. Paul is

not writing this as a detached theologian. He is writing this as a man who is in love with people. He's pouring out his heart here.

If you've taken notes this morning in Romans 9, Paul tells us the outline of the passage, very simple. He tell us three things about the love of God as it relates to Israel, three things about the love of God as it relates to Israel, and ultimately as it relates to us. Because as you're going to see, this stuff relates to us as well. It's the same kind of love for both the church and Israel.

But as Paul is talking about his love for the Jews, that bleeds over into a discussion of God's love for the Jews. He tells us three things about this. The first one is this. He says the love of God for Israel is specific. It's a specific type of love. By that, I mean it focuses on specific people.

We all understand, if you read the Old Testament, that God has a special place in His heart for Israel. You could just see that page after page. You read the New Testament, you see He has a special place in His heart for the church.

But tying this into Israel, Paul gives several examples from the Old Testament to talk about this. The first one is in verse six. If you read this, he says, "But it is not as though the word of God has failed." In other words, the word of God did not fail because Israel rejected Him; the word of God did not fail because the Jews turned their back on God. They crucified the Messiah. "It is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they're Abraham's descendants, but: 'Through Isaac your descendants will be named.'"

Just a few thoughts on this, Paul says an interesting phrase at the beginning there, "For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel," which is another way of saying they're not all Jews because they're born Jews. They're not all saved because they're born a child of Abraham. Paul says you have to be born again for that. As a matter of fact, Jesus said that. If you remember in John 3:3, talking to a Jew, talking to the teacher of Israel, Nicodemus, Jesus says in John 3:3, He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." It's been said nobody is born a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. You have to be born again for that.

That applies to us. They're not all Christians who are born Christians. You're not saved just because your parents are saved. It's great if your parents are save, but that doesn't save you. You have to be born again. You have to believe. It's been said that God has children, but He has no grandchildren. You get into heaven one at a time.

I heard this story recently about a pastor visiting with a family who had a six-year-old boy. The pastor asked the little boy, he says, "Are you a Christian?" and the boy said, "No, I'm not." He said, "My mom and dad said I have to believe in Jesus first." Good for them, because you do. You have to believe in Jesus before you're saved. That's the idea here. The Jews weren't saved by their parents, they're not saved in heaven by their birth. The word of God didn't fail because the nation rejected Him, because all the nation didn't believe.

Paul goes on to explain this in verse seven. He says, "Nor are they all children because they're Abraham's descendants, but: 'Through Isaac your descendants will be named.'"

This is the first

of several Old Testament references Paul makes in this chapter. He's going to make nine of them. This is the first one. It's a quotation from Genesis 21 where it says Abraham had two sons: Isaac and Ishmael. If you remember the Old Testament story, it says, "Through Isaac your descendants will be named." In other words, both sons were not let into the family. Both sons weren't Jews, only Isaac was.

Why? Here's where we go from man to God here. Here's where we go from man's belief to God's choosing. But this passage says it's because God chose Isaac. He loved him with a specific love. Verse eight says that, "It is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants." In other words, both sons were children of the flesh, but only Isaac was a child of the promise.

He goes on to say in the passage, I won't read this for the sake of time, but he goes on to say that not only did Abraham have two sons, but if you remember Isaac had two sons: Jacob and Esau. Verse 12 says, "The older will serve the younger." Verse 13 says, "Just as it is written, 'Jacob I love, but Esau I hated.'" Those are quotations from ... By the way, if you see something capitalized in your Bible, in your English translation, I told you this before, but that's a reference to a quotation from the Old Testament. That's from Genesis 25 and Malachi one, but the idea is that God loved Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau. That's why Isaac was saved, that's why Jacob was saved or put into the family. Ultimately, it rests on God. Salvation rests on His choosing.

That doesn't mean that God hated Esau literally. This is a figurative expression here. It doesn't mean He was out to get him. It just means that in comparison to His love for Jacob, it seemed like He hated him.

If you notice just a little more about this passage, verse 11 says that God decided to do this before the twins were born, or had done anything good or bad. "He did it," it says, "not because of works, but because of Him who calls." That sounds very similar to 2 Timothy 1:9, which we just read. In other words, the decision was made before anybody did anything. In eternity past, God chose to pick these sons as children of the promise.

Let's be honest this morning. As soon as you talk about this stuff, questions come up, don't they? At least they do for me anyway. I mean if you're reading this, you've got to have questions. I mean, I read this and questions just fly off the page at me, like, "What do you mean that God loved Jacob and hated Esau? I mean how does that work?" I mean imagine if you're Esau. I know he's hairy and probably didn't smell very good because he's outside all day, but that doesn't mean you've got to beat up on the guy. You guys haven't paid attention to your flannel graphs when you're growing up. Esau was always the hairy brother, Jacob was... Oh, you don't follow me at all.

By the way, doesn't Jacob's name mean "he deceives"? Okay, now why would you choose that guy? How can He do it in eternity past? I mean how could God do this before they were born? That seems strange. What about freewill? Paul just said the Jews aren't saved because they don't believe. What does that mean with all of this? Those are great questions, and Paul's going to address some of that in a moment, but I just want to say a few words about this.

For one thing, I want to say this. We don't really have answers to all these questions. I'm sorry to disappoint. I've racked my brain all week. I've had headaches all day, and there's no answers to some of this. I mean this hasn't been revealed to us. A lot of this is a mystery. Martin Luther said some things are too high for us, and this is one of those things. How God's choosing and man's will work perfectly together, we don't know. J.I. Packer said in order for God to be God, some things have to be this way. God has to keep some secrets from us. This is one of those.

If you think about it, if you think about the totality of Scripture, there's a lot of things we don't know in the Bible, I mean completely anyway. We know some things, but there's a lot of mystery, like the Trinity, for instance. Did anybody know everything about the Trinity? One God and three persons. I don't know everything about that. Jesus is fully man and fully God. He's not 50-50, He's 100% on both. I mean how does that work? It's a mystery.

What about the resurrection? We talked about the resurrection last week. We don't fully understand the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15 says, "Behold, I tell you a mystery." Paul says, "This is a mystery," the resurrection. "We will not all sleep, but we'll be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet." That is mysterious. Heaven and hell, there are mysteries to those, end times and prophecy, a literal six-day creation. We don't know all those things, but we believe them because they're in Scripture. It's the same way with this. It's a mystery, but this is what the Word of God says, and so we believe what has been revealed. We leave the mysteries in God's hands.

Augustine, in a debate he had with Pelagius, he said, "Are we to deny what is plain because we cannot comprehend what is hidden?" Does that make sense? You guys get that? Are we to deny what's plainly here because we can't comprehend what is not here? This leads to another thing to point out here. I think this will give you some encouragement. If you're a little discouraged by the mysteries, let me encourage you with this.

We do have some answers. We have lots of answers in Scripture. Like this one: we know what the love of God looks like in someone's life. Amen? I mean we know what it looks like when someone believes and is saved. The Bible tells us that it's not a mystery. When Paul says, "For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel," he doesn't mean, "I know a big secret." He doesn't mean, "I have something...some special mystery here." He says, "I can see it. They're not acting like they're saved. They've rejected the Messiah, they've rejected the promise, and real Jews don't act like that, so they're not believers."

He says, "Let's put the mysteries aside for a moment and talk about something we know. Do you believe in Jesus? Then you're saved. Amen?" Oh, come on, guys. Amen, Grace Fellowship Church? You can be a little charismatic this morning, that's okay. Are you trusting in Him? Then you're going to heaven. We know that. That's clearly revealed. Have you accepted the Messiah? Are you clinging to the promise? Do you love the Son of God? Then you're saved. We can leave the mysteries in God's hands. Listen, don't be so focused on the things you don't know that you forget what you do know. You know that all who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

I know some of you, just from talking to folks in our church, I think some of you came from churches that treat the doctrine of election like a crystal ball, where you shake it and shake it and

shake it and say, "Am I in or am I out? Am I elect or am I not?" That's not what Paul is doing here. He doesn't have a crystal ball. He doesn't know any secrets. He just says the Jews as a people aren't saved, because they're not acting like they're saved. Then he goes on and he says this is how God saves sinners. This is what He does behind the scenes. If we were to pull back the veil of eternity for a moment and look in, this is some of what we would see: God loves some people with a specific type of love.

And that leads to the next thing that Paul says about the love of God as it relates to Israel, and that is this: it is merciful. It is a specific type of love, but it's also a merciful love.

When you say that God loves some people specifically and not others, it sounds unfair, doesn't it? We just talked about that. It seems unjust. Now Paul goes on to address that here. He says, "You know what? It's not about justice, it's about mercy. It's not about God being fair, it's about God being gracious and compassionate."

He says it this way, if you look in verse 14, it says, "What shall we say then?" That's Paul's way of just summing up everything he said before and putting it into a question. "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!" The phrase "may it never be" is the Greek *mē ginomai*, which we've seen before. It's the strongest way to say "no" in the Greek language. It means, "No, no, no." Some of your translations may say "by no means", or "God forbid". Paul says, "God forbid that He could be unjust."

Then he says in verse 15, "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' Then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." If you notice the word "mercy" there, it's repeated, was it three times? I'll go on to say it again here in a moment. The phrase "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy" is a quotation from Exodus 33. It's another Old Testament quotation.

If you remember the context for this one, Moses has just gone up on Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. While he's up on the mountain, Israel's down at the bottom doing what? Breaking them. They're worshipping the golden calf, they're sinning. Moses is up on the mountain getting the law of God and Israel, before they even know what it is, is breaking it.

Now, again, put yourself in God's shoes for a minute. What would you do? You would say, "I'm not going to put up with this." Moses pleads with God when he hears about this not to destroy them. As a matter of fact, Moses is so angry, he does what? Breaks the Ten Commandments. He was the most sinful person who ever lived, because he broke all Ten Commandments at one time. Good, you guys got that. Okay, good. I hold my breath when I give a joke. I never know ...

Moses pleads with God after he breaks the Ten Commandments. He says, "Don't destroy them," and the Lord says in Exodus 33:19, he says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." In other words, "My love for Israel does not depend on Israel, it depends on Me. My love for them does not depend on justice, it depends on God who has mercy." God says, "They're not going to earn My love. They're never going to earn My love. It's not the point of these commandments. But I'm going to give it to them anyway."

Paul relates this to Pharaoh in verse 17. This is another episode from Israel's history. He says in verse 17, he says, "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.' So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." That's another quotation from the Book of Exodus.

In this one, this was a little bit before the other one, Moses is performing miracles. He's doing the ten plagues in Egypt, and Pharaoh rejects them. I mean he doesn't listen. You would think after your country is turned to darkness and your river's turned to blood and there's frogs in your house and gnats and boils, he would say, "I've had enough." Pharaoh didn't. The Bible says, as a result, God hardens Pharaoh's heart.

As a matter of fact, Exodus 8:32 says Pharaoh hardened his heart. Pharaoh resisted God. In Exodus 9:12, a few verses later, as a result, it says God hardened it, which makes you wonder what's going on there. But the idea is something like this: Pharaoh sinned and sinned and sinned to the point that God eventually said, "Do you want to sin, Pharaoh? Fine. Go ahead and sin. The gloves are off. You can have all the sin you want." We'll talk about that more in a moment. But I want to go back to the mercy of God here for a second, because I think this is important to get, to understand.

Let me just say it like this. Let me ask you a question again and get you thinking about God's mercy. Do you know why God has allowed you to be here this morning? Ever thought about that? Do you know why God has allowed you to sit under preaching and to sing with the saints and to fellowship with other Christians? It's because God is merciful to you. It's because He loves you with a special love. You could be sitting in the jungles of Africa right now. You could be on a deserted island where nobody does any of that stuff. But you're here. You didn't choose that. You didn't choose where you would grow up, how you would end up in Canada. God is showing you mercy.

Here's another question: Why have you lived this long? Ever wonder that? I did a little study on this today. It's a very sad statistic, but something like 21,000 children die every day in the world. I think if you did the math, it comes out to about 900 per hour and 15 per minute. Most of them never reach the age of five. I mean how old are some of us here today? 55, 65, 75. Why is that? Because God has been merciful.

Did you know that a billion people on the planet can't read? Of those who can, about a billion and a half don't have the Bible in their language, but you do. You can read it right here. Why is that? Because God is merciful in a million different ways and a billion different ways. This is just another example of this.

Look, guys, justice has nothing to do with our salvation, on our end anyway. It has nothing to do with getting to heaven. Paul says, "It does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." Look, God should have destroyed Israel on Mount Sinai. I mean God should have wiped them out right then and there. They were bowing down to a cow when they should have been bowing down to Him. They were praising a statue when they should have been praising Him, but He didn't.

God should have killed you and God should have killed me. He should have taken all that debt and crushed us with it, but He didn't because He's merciful, because He loves us. There's no other reason. We could sit down for hours after the sermon and think about, well, is there any other reason why God would do this? And you can't think of any other one but the fact that He's merciful.

In one of his books, R.C. Sproul tells a story of the time he taught a class in college and he gave the students three papers to turn in. If they turned any of them in late, they got an F on the paper. That was how the class was set up. If they turned a paper in late, they failed the paper. The time for the first one to be turned in came around, and a few students turned it in late. They didn't have it ready. R.C. Sproul heard a bunch of excuses and then said, "That's okay. You can turn that one in late, no F. I'll let it slide." Some of you guys, if you've been in a college class, you know where this is going.

It came time for the second paper to be turned in, and this time more students didn't have it ready, about a third of the class. They gave their excuses, "My pet frog died," and, "My dog ate my homework," and, "I sprained my ankle on the way to class today," or something. R.C. Sproul says, "Okay, turn it in late, no F. You can let it slide."

Well, the time for the last paper to be turned in came, and more than half the class didn't have it ready, like 60%. R.C. Sproul said, "Okay. That's enough. If you didn't have it done on time, you fail the paper. You get an F." An uproar went up in the classroom. Students were furious. One student kept saying, "You can't do that, Dr. Sproul. That's not fair. You can't do that. That's not fair," to which R.C. Sproul said, "You want fair, Mr. Jones?" He says, "I see that you didn't turn the first paper in on time. You get an F for that one. You want fair? I see you didn't turn the second one in on time. F for that one. You didn't turn the third paper in on time. You get an F for that one, too. You wanted justice, but I was offering you mercy. You wanted fairness, but I was offering you grace."

Friends, you don't want the pure justice of God this morning poured out on you. You don't want fairness, not pure fairness. You want it poured out on Christ because fairness on you means you go to hell. You want God's mercy. You want His grace. That's what Paul is talking about in Romans 9. He says, "Look, before you go accusing God of all these things, let's back the truck up for a minute and remember it is the mercy of God that brings us into heaven." Amen? "It is His grace."

It leads us to one more thing Paul says about the love of God as it relates to Israel here. He says it is specific. It focuses on some more than others. It is merciful because we can't be saved any other way. We can only be saved through the mercy of God. One more thing Paul says about the love of God relating to Israel: it is universal, which means that it's available for everyone. It's not universal in the sense that everyone is saved, but it's universal in the sense that it extends to everyone who believes in a way that we can't explain, that goes beyond our understanding.

Paul says, "God elects some to salvation, but everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." He said God loves some with a specific love, but He makes a universal offer to everyone. We might add that this is a genuine offer.

It was Francis Schaeffer who said our decisions in life are real decisions. If you reject Jesus Christ, you go to hell. If you believe in Jesus Christ, you go to heaven. That is a real decision. When someone calls on the name of the Lord, they're truly saved, completely saved.

To show this, Paul relates this to the Gentiles. He starts with Israel, but he ends with the Gentiles, non-Jews. If you remember, non-Jews were a lost group of people in the Old Testament. Let me actually walk you through the rest of this passage pretty quickly to get to what he says here. But if you look in verse 19, Paul says,

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this?" will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honourable use and another for common use?

I won't say much about this other than just to point out this is really the only answer you get in the Bible to the question: why does God choose some and not others? Why does He love Jacob, but hate Esau? This really the only answer.

In my research this week, I came across one author who said with regards to this whole question, it's almost like the authors of the Bible never knew it was a question because they never interact with it, except for this one time. Paul says, "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?" He's not trying to be harsher there, he's just trying to put things in perspective.

Look, when you ask theological questions, Paul says, remember you're talking about God here. Remember to do so with respect and honour. Remember to be humble. He says, "The thing molded does not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this?" That's kind of an arrogant thing. Paul says be humble when you ask this.

He says in verse 22, he says, "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" That's a tough verse in English. It takes a lot of working through, but the Greek does help a little bit here, because in the Greek the word for "prepared" is passive, which means God is not the one doing the preparing. It says something like, "Endured with much patience, vessels of wrath that have been prepared for destruction."

The Scriptures tell us God is not the author of sin. God doesn't tempt anyone to sin. Men sin of their own accord. God just says, "If you want to sin, fine. Go ahead and sin. If you want to have a hard heart, Pharaoh, you can have it." But on the contrary, verse 23 says, "And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles." The word "prepared" there in Greek is an active word, which means that God actively prepares some for glory. He actively predestined some for salvation.

Paul says, "Not from among Jews only, but also among Gentiles," which is a very interesting thing to say. Because to a Jew, the Gentiles did not belong in the same category as them when it came to salvation. To a Jew, Gentiles don't belong in the same kingdom.

Remember Jesus was witnessing to a Gentile woman. She was talking to Him about salvation and miracles. She referred to herself as the dog that picks up scraps from the table. Do you remember that? That was a Gentile in the first century. They were dogs to the Jews.

I mean if you're talking about honourable and common pottery here, Gentiles are the common pottery. They're the worthless pottery, the one with no decoration on it. If you're talking about vessels of wrath, a Jew would look at that and say, "Yeah, that's the Gentiles." Paul says not anymore. He says now Gentiles can be saved, too.

He says in verse 25, "As he says also in Hosea". Now he's going back to the Old Testament to show them that this was an Old Testament idea. "He says also in Hosea, 'I will call those who were not my people, "My people," and her who is not beloved, "beloved."'"

If you skip on down, just for the sake of time, if you look in verse 30, he says, "What shall we say then?" Again, there's that expression of summing things up.

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith. But Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.

We're going to talk about some of this next week, this whole dynamic of Israel and the Gentiles. But Paul essentially says here that the Gentiles are being saved, because the Jews won't believe. People like you and me are going to heaven because Israel rejected their Messiah. I mean not all the Jews rejected their Messiah. I mean Paul was a Jew, and he accepted Him. But as a nation, the Jews rejected Him.

I think we all understand Jesus came offering a kingdom to Israel. He came offering to be their Messiah, but they wouldn't have it. As a matter fact, they put their Messiah on a cross. Above Him, it said, "Here's Jesus, the King of the Jews." As a result, the kingdom is now being offered to Gentiles, to non-Jews. In the words of Luke 14, "The messengers have gone out to the highways and byways to invite the lame and the diseased, the sick and the poor."

By the way, so you don't have too high of an opinion of yourself this morning, you and I are the lame and diseased and the sick and the poor. That's a reference to Gentiles. 1 Corinthians one says, "God chose the foolish and base things of the world". I mean to a Jew, there was nothing more base, worldly than a Gentile.

Here's the mystery to this. (We keep using that word this morning because it's a good word for this passage). I mean I read this thing, it's just mystery, mystery, mystery popping out. But here's the mystery. We talk so much about God's sovereignty in His choosing, which is all throughout this passage. But here's the unknown thing here. He came to us because Israel didn't believe. You

see that? Of their own free will, of their choosing, Paul says, Israel pursued salvation by works and the Gentiles pursued it by faith. As a result, the Gentiles were being saved.

Verse 33 says, "Just as it is written, 'Behold, I lay in Zion on a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.'" That's a quotation from the Book of Isaiah, Isaiah 28:16. It means that Israel stumbled over Jesus. As a nation, they fell over Him and were shattered into a million pieces. As a matter fact, in AD 70, around that time, a few decades after Jesus was on the earth, the Romans will come in and just wipe Jerusalem almost off the face of the earth.

Now how all that works with election and God's specific love that we've talked about, I don't know. Paul doesn't say here. This is the mystery, but this is what he's saying. It leads me to this. As I've said several times this morning, I think it helps to put the mysteries on hold a little bit and talk about something very simple. Here's a very simple application to this here. What are you doing with Jesus Christ this morning? Let's close this with a very clear application of this, putting the mysteries on a shelf for a moment.

What are you doing with Jesus? Are you stumbling over Him, or are you believing in Him? Are you trusting in Him, or are you being shattered over Him? They say you can either build on a rock or you can trip on it. You can either stand on a stone or you can fall over it. Which one is it? Are you building or tripping? Are you standing or falling on the Messiah?

Let me ask this another way. Has Jesus Christ ever disappointed you? It's a simple application of this. The text says, "He who believes in Him will not be disappointed." Let me ask, has Jesus ever disappointed you? Has He ever let you down? I know the answer to that. Of course not. Believe in Him. Trust in Him. Listen, friends, God has opened the way of salvation to you, Gentiles. He's letting you into the kingdom, you poor and sick, you lame and diseased. I can call you that because I'm one of them.

Paul says be sure to get into the kingdom, come to the Messiah. Don't let anything hold you back. Romans 10:13, just in the next chapter, says this very clearly. After one of the clearest expressions of God's sovereignty in election in Romans 9, Paul says one of the clearest expressions calling us to salvation. In Romans 10:13, in the very next chapter, he says, "For whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

That word "whoever" in Greek means "whoever". You go to seminary for stuff like that. Spend hours and hours and hours so you can say that. It means Jew, Gentile. It means you lived a moral life growing up or an immoral life growing up. "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Do you want to be saved? Then you call on Him. Do you want to go to heaven? Then you ask Him to let you in, and He'll do it. Jesus Himself said in John 6:37, and here's an expression of God's sovereignty and man's will put together again, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me. And the one who comes to Me I will not cast out."

The hope you have in that passages is if you come to Jesus, He will not cast you out. Come to Jesus. Believe and be saved. Come to the One who loves you with a specific love and a merciful love and a universal love. Come to the One who has loved since the beginning of time in a way no one else could.

A doctor was once visiting a captain in the army. He said, "Captain, you lost your arm to a great cause," to which the captain said, "I didn't lose my arm, I gave it away." Friends, God didn't lose His Son. He gave Him away for you and for me and anyone who would believe in Him. Would you believe in Him today? Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, we've come to a very, very deep passage this morning. I humbly pray that we would have done justice to it. I pray that we would be accurate to Your text and have hearts that are ready to hear these difficult things. Lord, thank you for the hope that is in this passage. There's hope for Gentiles, there's hope for people that did not grow up with all the promises to Israel, at least we were not Israelites in the Old Testament. But You say here that whoever calls can be saved. Lord, we thank You for this hope. I pray that if there's any here who have not called that they would call on Jesus, that they would come to Him and be born again.

Lord, we do thank You that as we study Your love, we remember how deep of a subject it is, and how it's a subject that can never be explored to the fullest. We went over this chapter this morning, we could go back over it again and discover all kinds of new things. But, Lord, we rejoice in the depth of Your love because it's our sole grounds of salvation. We can throw ourselves on Your mercy and know that You will hear us when we pray and when we call. Lord, may You be glorified in our church as we want to reach out to the lost and invite them to Christ. May we go out and do that today. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.