

In View of God's Mercy

Romans 9:1-10:17

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Over the last couple of months, we have looked at this letter written by Paul to the early church in Rome – the goal was unity and maturity in Christ, helping these Christians see the reality of sin throughout all of humanity, the grace of God at work among all who call on the name of Jesus, the one new humanity in Christ made possible by the Gospel, the holiness and power of God to save and redeem people, and the freedom from condemnation we now have as children of God who trust in His unfailing love.

Today – we will see one very clear message: God is sovereign over salvation and because of that sovereignty, we are to walk humbly with God and one another while we confidently proclaim the grace and truth of Jesus, knowing that He is the God of salvation.

God's Sovereign Choice

9 I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— **2** that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. **3** For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

Paul is not treating this lightly – as he talks about the Gospel – that salvation is for all who by grace through faith trust in Jesus – he is grieving the fact that so many of his fellow Jews are not trusting in Jesus.

4 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. **5** To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Israel knew all of this – they knew they were the chosen nation, they knew the covenants, they knew God's faithfulness to rescue them from Egypt, they knew His provision in the exodus, His victories in the Promised Land, they understood the law and sacrificial system, they understood what it meant to worship God, they knew they were waiting on a promised Messiah – and yet as John 1:11 says, "Jesus came to his own, and his own people did not receive him."

6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, **7** and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." **8** This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. **9** For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son."

In Genesis 17:19 – God promises that Abraham's wife who is barren will have a son, and that with that son God will establish his covenant with him, but with well intended disobedience Abraham had already conceived Ishmael with another woman, Hagar who was his wife Sarah's Egyptian maid. Abraham and Sarah had lost patience with God's promise. Abraham was 86 years old. Yet God still says to them – I will establish my covenant with Isaac, and I will do so through Sarah your barren wife. When Abraham was 100 years old, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. God was faithful to His promise, and God's purpose still stands, that Abraham's offspring would be through Isaac – through His miraculous power and His promise keeping, because God's plan will prevail.

10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, **11** though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— **12** she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” **13** As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

Paul is continuing to make the point, that God is sovereign over salvation and is showing that God's plan of ultimate redemption in Christ, is in fact being worked out over history.

With Jacob and Esau, Paul is illustrating the fact that even though Jacob and Esau were twin brothers, that even though they had the same mother and father, salvation is not based on birth order, social status, on being good or bad, but on God's grace alone. This is difficult to understand from a human perspective — but in Malachi 1 we see that God chooses to reject Esau (Moo: the word “hate” may be better understood as rejection since this is based not on God's emotions but his saving actions) ¹

14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!**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.” **16** So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. **17** 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.” **18** So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

God achieves His purpose and demonstrates his power and glory, as He rescues Israel from the oppression of Pharaoh. God will have mercy on people – as He determines. God will have compassion on people as he determines. Salvation depends on God, and not on human effort or desire. Our only appropriate response can truly be in humility – God have mercy on me.

John Stott, “The wonder is not that some are saved and others are not, but that anybody is saved at all. For we deserve nothing at God's hand but judgment. If we receive what we deserve which is judgment or we receive what we do not deserve, which is mercy, in neither case is God unjust. Therefore, if anybody is lost, the blame is theirs, but if anybody is saved the credit is God's.”

19 You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” **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?” **21** 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? **22** 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, **23** in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— **24** even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

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.’”

¹ Moo, Letter 587

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.”

We see in Hosea – that God will save both Jews and Gentiles – that God will call people from both, “my people”. Isaiah’s point – God’s faithfulness, mercy and sovereign plan is the only reason that more destruction like what happened with Sodom and Gomorrah didn’t happen.

It is helpful to acknowledge and embrace the mystery here – Charles Spurgeon when asked about reconciling God’s sovereignty and human responsibility, he said “I never reconcile friends - High Doctrine and Broad Doctrine.”

Israel's Unbelief

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.”

Romans 10:1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. **2** For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. **3** For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. **4** For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Doug Moo, in his commentary on Romans puts it plainly, “Because the Jews have not understood that Christ has brought the law to its culmination, they have not responded in faith to Christ, and they have therefore missed the righteousness of God, available only in Christ on the basis of faith”

Again – we see Paul’s heart and desire – he wants Jewish people – to be saved. His burden is that they would truly see Jesus for who he is – but his burden is not just for Jewish people, but for all people know and see Jesus for who he is.

The Message of Salvation to All

5 For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. **6** But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) **7** “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). **8** But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); **9** because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. **11** For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” **12** For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. **13** For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. With the heart one believes and is justified - and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

It does not say everyone will not be put to shame. Truth be told - everyone already has a shame issue. What it does say is that “everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”

The same Lord is Lord of all - bestowing riches on all who call on him. For, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

14 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? **15** 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!” **16** But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” **17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Beautiful feet belong to those who preach the good news.

Those who preach are sent so that people can hear.

Those who hear are among those who will also believe.

Those who believe are those who will call on his name.

Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.

God open our hearts that we may believe.

God open our ears that we may hear.

God open our mouths that we may confess true confidence in Jesus Christ.

God open our hands that we would gladly and joyfully carry the gospel to the ends of the earth.

So in view of God’s mercy...

God is sovereign over salvation and because of that sovereignty, we are to walk humbly with God and one another while we confidently proclaim the grace and truth of Jesus, knowing that He is the God of salvation.

Because He is sovereign – We can confidently proclaim the Gospel, because we know we are sent, but more than that, we know He will save. He will fully apply all the perfect work of Jesus, not one bit of the Gospel will be wasted.

Romans 8:28-31 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Before Grace Auburn – we lived in Asian cities where the overwhelming millions among us did not know, had not heard, did not believe. One of the greatest and most difficult assignments of our lives was to live and serve among unreached peoples in Asia.

Nellie Ethel Bowen was a young missionary in China – in the early 1900s. She lived with passion and purpose among Chinese people who had never heard the Gospel. She cared for a young girl that did not have parents. She, like most missionaries, struggled with discomfort, fear, discouragement and the very real sacrifice of living in a difficult place. She wrote this poem:

An easy thing, O Power Divine, To thank Thee for these gifts of Thine, For summer's sunshine, winter's snow, The hearts that burn, the hearts that glow: But when shall I attain to this, To thank Thee for the things I miss.

For all young fancy's early gleams, The dreamed of joys, that still are dreams, Hopes unfulfilled and pleasures known. Through others' fortunes, not my own, And blessings seen that are not given, And never will be this side of heaven.

Had I, too, shared the joys I see, Would there have been a heaven for me? Should I have felt Thy being near, Had I possessed what I hold dear? My deepest knowledge, highest bliss, Have come perchance from things I miss.

Today has brought an hour of calm. Grief turns to blessing, pain to balm, I feel a power above my will, That draws me, draws me onward still, And now my heart attains to this, To thank Thee for the things I miss.

Nellie Ethel Bowen January 22, 1911 - Changsha, China.

Three years after writing this poem, still living in China, she had recovered from an illness and was able to engage in ministry again. As she was traveling back from the hospital, she encountered a group of Chinese people near her home and began to minister to them. Little did she know they had smallpox and that she would die from serving them. But as she lay dying, she wanted her family and loved ones to know, “There is victory in the camp”. This young lady died at the age of 25, and her prayer was that another generation filled with the Spirit of Christ would come and serve among those people. 100 years later, my family would be living in this same region. This young lady, who gave her life, was my wife’s great great aunt.

We had no idea. We discovered her story as we too were living on the other side of earth. Her sufferings and her confidence in the Gospel have been a source of great comfort and inspiration to us now for many years.

I want to challenge you today – put your Yes on the table before God. Maybe Yes means staying here. But maybe Yes means He will move you there. There among an unreached people group, there in a global city where millions of people haven’t heard, there among the poor and marginalized, there among those who don’t have a Bible in their language, there among those where there isn’t a single known believer... How will they hear?

See what He may want you to do. As Christ followers, we are all called to ministry, all called to make disciples, all called to joyful generosity, all called to the great commission, we have all been given the ministry of gospel reconciliation. In view of God’s mercy – is there anything you need to say yes to in Jesus name?

