

What Advantage Is There? Romans 2:25-3:4 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: There are a great many advantages to preaching systematically through a book of the Bible, as opposed to a topical approach or worse yet randomly deciding week to week where I might preach from. I have found expositional preaching to be superior to other approaches in almost every way, but one - holiday preaching.

Holidays are a cultural phenomenon that the wise leader must leverage for the good of the Kingdom. So, it is entirely appropriate to take a break from studying from time to time in order to preach a "holiday" sermon. Yet, it is difficult for the preacher - we give ourselves to the text. I wake up thinking Romans, I shave thinking Romans, I drive to work thinking Romans.

I say all of that to say that I have to ask, is it possible to do both? To remain faithful to the text that I am preaching and to simultaneously preach, for example, a Mother's Day sermon? At first glance, Romans was not very cooperative.

I considered **Romans 3:12 (ESV)**

¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.

I could call the sermon, "The Worthless Mother, or "The Sinful Momma". But I'm not sure how encouraging that would be to the moms in the audience. So I looked closer at the text, and I found something that just might work. Let me show you in Romans 3:1.

CONTEXT: Now remember that the church in Rome is made up of believing Jews and believing Gentiles, as was the case with most every church in the New Testament. As such, there were a great many conflicts and issues that needed to be addressed, as we have already seen.

Paul is seeking to bring unity and peace to the truth groups by fully leveraging the Gospel, which he declared in **Romans 1:16**, that he was not ashamed of, for it is the power of God unto salvation unto all who believe, the Jew first, then the Greek.

What followed was a systematic application of the claims of the Gospel to both groups.

- Two weeks ago, he began by exposing the lost condition of the Gentile world, which had been given over by God to every form of perversion and sin.
- Last week, he proved that the Jewish members of the congregation were no less lost and in need of a Savior. They who had been under the law of Moses and the Word of the Prophets - they were not less accountable but more accountable than the Gentiles.

NOW - Paul, as a brilliant teacher, anticipates the pushback of his readers. He seems to anticipate that the Jew would push back at this point and say, "Well, what good is it to be a Jew if this is the case?"

Paul, if who are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are just as lost as our Gentile counterparts, was it all a glorious waste of time?

- The promises to Abraham
- The covenant with God
- The practice of Circumcision
- The alters and sacrifices

For thousands of years, the Jews had declared themselves to be God's chosen people. Set apart for a holy purpose. But now, here is Paul seeming to say it was to no benefit whatsoever.

Look at how he puts it in

TEXT: Romans 2:25–29 (ESV)

²⁵ For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. ²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.

So there you see it - the Jew is no less in need of a Savior because he is Jew, and the Gentile is no more difficult to save than is the Jew.

²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

So then, Paul, what difference does it make? Were all of the things we read about in our Genesis study to no avail? Notice how he poses the question they were all thinking in Romans 3:1–8 (ESV)

¹ Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?

Now, following the trend of Paul's argument, one might expect him to answer, "no advantage whatsoever". But that is not at all what he says....

² Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

Follow his logic - what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of circumcision? MUCH in EVERY WAY! In other words, if you thought Paul was saying there was no benefit to Jewish heritage, you completely misunderstood his point.

No, there is a GREAT Advantage in being a Jew. MUCH, in EVERY WAY.

Then Paul writes, to begin with... that phrase seems to indicate that a list is coming, first of all this, then secondly that. But that's not the way Paul is using the Greek here. The way to think of it is, "PRIMARY Among the many advantages".

What is this primary advantage? The Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

MOTHERS DAY: But wait a minute, Pastor Zach... what on earth does this have to do with Mother's Day? I'm so glad you asked. I want to suggest to you that the same PRIMARY ADVANTAGE that was given to the Jewish Race in the Old Testament has been given to boys and girls who are raised by a Christian mother in the New Testament.

Notice first of all...

1. The Privilege Pondered (v. 1)

1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?

He has just spent two chapters proving that the Jew is no better off than the Gentile when it comes to salvation. The Jew is not saved by being a Jew. The Jew is not saved by being circumcised. So... was it all for nothing? Was there no point at all in being God's covenant people? Did the Old Testament really matter?

That question forms our first point. And it is a question that still reverberates through Christian homes today. Sometimes it sounds like this: *"Pastor, my children grew up in this church. They sat in those pews. They went to AWANA. They went on the youth retreats. But they're still rebellious. They're still lost. So what was the point?"*

ILLUSTRATION: I remember in college, our church would bring a steady stream of speakers to our city who had been saved from terrible backgrounds. Jay Strack did every drug known to man before being gloriously saved. I've heard of pimps and prostitutes who tell the most compelling testimonies. One guy was even a Don in the Mafia, and he was saved.

A Christian parent can be tempted to think, well, what difference did all of that upbringing make? Pastor, my children grew up in this church. They sat in those pews. They went to AWANA. They went on the youth retreats. But they're still rebellious. They're still lost. So what was the point?

Paul will not let us conclude that there was no benefit, no privilege, no advantage to being part of God's covenant people. And neither should we conclude that there is no advantage to having a believing mother. There is. There is a tremendous one.

KEEP IN MIND: Some Jews believed that the very act of being circumcised had saved them. The Latin theologians had a phrase for this — *ex opere operato* — "by the work performed." It is the idea that a religious rite, simply by being performed, automatically

conveys grace. But that is not the case. As Paul argued in chapter 2 verse 25, “circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.”

The mere fact that an infant has been sprinkled does not save him. A Child going through Parent/Child dedication does not save them. The mere fact that an adult has been immersed does not save him.

There is no transmissible grace in an ordinance. Just because your child grew up in this church does not mean your child is saved. Just because she walked the aisle at age six does not mean she is saved. ***Salvation is by grace, through faith, in Christ alone.***

But to say that something does not automatically save is not the same as saying it offers no advantage. That is a false dichotomy, or what is called a false binary.

Paul says these things don't save, but the advantage is MUCH in every way.

Now that the Privilege has been pondered, notice secondly...

2. The Profit Proclaimed (v. 2a)

² Much in every way.

Paul's answer is emphatic. Not “well, a little.” Not “in some respects.” Not “perhaps in certain limited ways.” **MUCH IN EVERY WAY.** Whatever you can think of, multiply it. The advantage is more than you can count.

Mothers, hear me this morning. If you have raised your child in a Christian home— if you have read the Word to them, sung the Word with them, prayed the Word over them — you have given them MUCH IN EVERY WAY.

You may feel that you have not given them what other parents have given. Maybe you couldn't afford the private school. Maybe you couldn't take them to Disney every summer. Maybe you couldn't buy them the car they wanted at sixteen. But if you put the Word of God into their souls, you have given them an inheritance that moths and rust cannot destroy and that thieves cannot break in and steal.

Listen to Paul writing to young Timothy:

2 Timothy 1:5 (ESV)

5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

And again,

2 Timothy 3:14–15 (ESV)

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with

the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Did you catch that? The reason Paul could trust Timothy with the church at Ephesus, the reason Timothy could lead, the reason Timothy could endure suffering for the gospel — was because somewhere in a humble home in Lystra, a mother named Eunice and a grandmother named Lois had spent years pouring the Word of God into a little boy's ears.

They didn't have an Old Testament app on a phone. They didn't have a children's storybook Bible. They had the scrolls — and they had a child whose ears they whispered them into. From the cradle, that little boy heard the Word of God.

What advantage is there to that? You ask - MUCH IN EVERY WAY. Remember - faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God!

The Privilege Pondered, the Profit Proclaimed...

3. The Possession Passed On (v. 2b)

What was this great advantage the Jews were given?

Romans 3:2b (ESV)

...the Jews were **entrusted** with the oracles of God.

Now we come to the heart of it. Two things demand our attention here: the OBJECT — “the oracles of God” — and the ACTION — “entrusted with.”

A. The Object

The phrase “oracles of God” is striking. It appears only four times in the entire New Testament. Let me show you the other three times...

The defense of Stephen in Acts 7:38 (ESV)

³⁸ This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. **He received living oracles** to give to us.

Another is Hebrews 5:12 (ESV)

¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of **the oracles of God**. You need milk, not solid food,

A third time in 1 Peter 4:11 (ESV)

¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks **oracles of God**;...

In each case, the meaning is the same: a divine utterance, a divine revelation, the very speech of God Himself.

ILLUSTRATION: Warren Buffett has consistently chosen his stocks in a profitable way. Thus, he has been called the Oracle of Ohama.

An oracle is an authoritative utterance from a higher source.

Notice this carefully: the oracles of God do not just include the **IDEAS** of God; they include the very **WORDS** of God. Not merely the sentiment, but the actual syllables. Not merely the gist, but the grammar. The whole of the Old Testament — and we may rightly add, the whole of the New Testament — is the very oracles of God.

2 Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV)

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:19–21 (ESV)

¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Mothers, the Bible you read to your children is not just a book of stories. It is not just a book of moral lessons. It is the very speech of the living God. When you open the cover, God speaks. When you turn the page, God speaks again.

There is no higher privilege any human being can enjoy than to be spoken to by God Himself.

ILLUSTRATION: Think of how people respond when somebody famous notices them. If a celebrity walks past — a famous athlete, a king, a queen — and that person merely glances at us, we tell our friends about it for years afterward. But if that famous person actually stopped and SPOKE to us, said our name, asked us a question, we would tell our grandchildren about it. There is something exhilarating about being addressed by a person of greatness. Now multiply that by infinity. There is nothing more thrilling than this — that the God of heaven, who flung the stars into space, who set the planets spinning, who knows the number of hairs on your head, has SPOKEN. And His speech has been preserved for us in this Book.

Think of what God did for Israel. He brought them through the Red Sea on dry ground. He drowned Pharaoh's army. He fed them with manna for forty years. He brought them through the Jordan. He toppled the walls of Jericho with a march and a shout. These were stupendous miracles. But Paul does NOT say, ***“What is the advantage of being a Jew? Much in every way! To begin with, they walked through the Red Sea.”*** No, he reaches past every miracle, past every wonder, past every wall that fell, and lays his

hand on the SCROLLS. The greatest privilege of being a Jew was not that they were a delivered people, but that they were a SPEAKING-GOD'S people. They had the Word.

Moses did the same in Deuteronomy 8:3 (ESV)

³ And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but *man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*

And here is the negative side of the same coin. If the greatest privilege a person can enjoy is to be spoken to by God, then the greatest tragedy a person can suffer is for God to stop speaking. Listen to

Amos 8:11–12 (ESV)

¹¹ “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. ¹² They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it.

A famine of bread is terrible. A drought of water is worse. But a famine of the Word of God? That is the most desolate condition any soul can know. To be left to ourselves. To be cut off from the speaking God. To have heaven shut up and silent.

Mothers, do not raise your children in a scriptural famine. Do not let your home be one in which the Word of God is rarely heard. Set the table for them every day with the bread of life.

You see, mothers, listen carefully. Paul does not merely say that the Jews HAD the oracles of God. He says they were **ENTRUSTED** with them.

The word means something was given into their care. They were stewards, custodians, guardians.

ILLUSTRATION: Think of what it means to be entrusted with something. If a friend hands you the key to their house while they are away, you are entrusted. If a bank hands you the combination to a safe deposit box, you are entrusted. If God places a child in your arms — you are entrusted. To be entrusted is to be given something that does not belong to you, to keep it, to guard it, to use it well, and one day to give an account.

Mothers, when God places a child in your arms, He places more than a child. He places a soul. And He places, often, a Bible nearby. And He says, “I am entrusting these oracles to your care. Pour them into this little soul. Read them at the breakfast table. Pray them at the bedside. Sing them in the car. Whisper them when she is afraid in the dark. Memorize them with him before he can write his name. Make sure that when this child grows up, he can stand and say, *‘I cannot remember a time when I did not know the Word of God, because my mother put it into me.’*”

Solomon, writing in Proverbs, did not say, “Hear, my son, your father's instruction” only. He said: **Proverbs 1:8 (ESV)**

8 Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching.

The mother is named alongside the father as a teacher of God's truth. In the holy economy of the home, the mother is a theologian. The Mother is a Bible scholar. The Mother is the first preacher most of us ever heard.

- **Susanna Wesley**, who taught nineteen children, several of whom died in infancy, and whose son John Wesley led a revival that some say saved England from a French-style revolution.
- **Monica**, the praying mother of Augustine, who refused to give up on her wayward son, and whose tears, she was told, “could not be lost.”
- **Eunice and Lois**, who taught Timothy the sacred writings from infancy.
- **Hannah**, who prayed for years for a son and then dedicated him to the LORD as soon as he was weaned, and whose boy Samuel grew up to anoint kings.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

When the dust of history finally settles, when our names are forgotten and our buildings have crumbled, the legacy that will remain is the Word of God in the hearts of our children, planted there by faithful mothers.

So this Mother's Day morning, I leave you with three charges:

- If you have a mother that gave you the word, thank God for her. Tell her so today, while you still can.
- If you ARE a praying mother, take heart. **Isaiah 55:11 (ESV)** ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
- If you have not yet trusted Christ, take the step that the oracles of God call you to make: confess that you are a sinner, repent of your self-reliance, and place your faith in Jesus Christ alone.

What advantage is there in being raised in a Christian home? What profit is there in having a praying mother? What good came of all those nights at the kitchen table reading from a children's Bible? What good came of those bedside prayers that you thought were forgotten?

MUCH IN EVERY WAY. You have been entrusted with the oracles of God.