

God Saves

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[0 : 00] Good afternoon and welcome to our lunchtime Bible talk. My name is Josh Johnston and I'm part of the staff team here.

And this week we're going to be looking at the first 18 verses of Romans chapter 9. Now let me pray as we begin.

Father, we thank you that we can join together on this Wednesday lunchtime to have fellowship and to sit under your words. We do pray that your spirit will be with us as we read and as we search and study together that you would be teaching us more of yourself.

Father, help us not to be your judge, not to sit in judgment on you, but to see you as who you really are in the scriptures and to have faith in the true and living God.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Please do turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 9. Romans chapter 9 and we're going to read the first 18 verses together.

[1 : 08] Romans 9 verses 1 to 18. I am speaking the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

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. They are Israelites and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises.

To them belong the patriarchs. And from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

But it is not as though the word of God is failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel. And not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring.

But through Isaac shall your offspring be named. 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.

[2 : 19] For this is what the promise said. About this time next year I will return and Sarah shall have a son. And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 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 his call, she was told, the older will serve the younger.

As it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. 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. 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.

Imagine that a meteor strike was coming to hit Scotland. Destruction's imminent, but you've been informed about it.

[3 : 45] You know it's coming, and you've been offered an escape route. You can leave. There's time. Somebody has offered you a flight out of here. The problem is, your family don't believe you.

They won't listen to you, and they're not going to go with you. They don't trust this man who's offered you a way out. They think he's crazy. You plead and plead and plead with them, but they ignore you.

Keep that feeling in mind, and you'll begin to understand Paul's emotional state as he begins to write Romans chapter 9. I'm sure there are maybe some of you here today that already know that feeling.

Perhaps you're a parent who has brought your children to church their whole lives. You've taught them at home. You've prayed for them. They know the Bible. They've been loved by the church, but they just won't follow Jesus.

They know all of the promises of God. They know about his grace and sin, but they won't trust Jesus as Savior. Has God failed? Can we trust him?

[4 : 54] Is he good? Why does God save some and not others? Paul was familiar with these questions and feelings, and that's how he begins this passage.

He mourns over his fellow Jews who reject Jesus, but he helps us think through this. He recognizes, and this is our first point, that a privileged heritage does not rescue from present hard-heartedness.

A privileged heritage does not rescue from present hard-heartedness in verses 1 to 5. Verses 1 and 2, Paul is in anguish and sorrow. He's been explaining at length the grace of God, the gospel, which is the power of God for salvation, to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and to the Greek. But Paul also knows that his own people have rejected this gospel. Paul loves the gospel, and he loves his people. And he's just explained in chapter 8 that it's impossible to be cut off from Christ if we have faith in him.

But it doesn't stop him from saying, in 9 verse 3, for I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers.

[6 : 11] He knows he can't be cut off from God, but he would swap places in an instant that he might be cut off if only they might experience the true grace of God.

But remember, a privileged heritage does not rescue from present hardness. That's the tragic thing. The Jews know all about God. Verses 4 and 5.

Paul's Jewish brothers were privileged. Adoption, the law, the covenants, the promises, the glory, and the worship all belong to them. They're Israelites, members of God's chosen nation.

Paul recaps the whole history of Israel's salvation and their relationship with God. Adoption as firstborn, receiving the law, God's own words, given to them, the patriarchs, all the covenants, all the interactions where God said to his people, you will be my people and I will be your God.

They had all the privileges. Even the promised savior, verse 5, promised savior of the whole world even came from amongst them. They have all the privileges but refuse to see their main one.

[7 : 25] They don't recognize Jesus, the one who fulfills all their other privileges properly. They fail to see Jesus. And so Paul mourns for them.

He knows of their heritage but he mourns that they're hard to the gospel. And that's right. It shows that Romans is not some hard, cold doctrinal thesis.

It's a letter from a real person to a real church. And it shows Paul is really, really sad for his fellow Jews.

how can it be that I have come to trust Jesus, that my brother Ben has come to trust Jesus, that my mom trusts Jesus but my brother Jamie doesn't.

Having been brought up in the same way at the same church, being taught the same things, how can it be that he won't trust Jesus? It's right to mourn about that sort of thing.

[8 : 31] But it is possible to grow up in church and know about God but not trust Jesus. So where does this leave us? Does this mean that God's word has failed?

Can we not trust his promise of salvation? Has he lied? Is he not good? He has not failed, not at all. That's how Paul answers.

The next two points really are proving this same answer. And thankfully for us, when Paul was writing this letter to the Romans, he must have had a heckler who asked these very questions. Has God's word failed? He must have asked for verse 6. And then in verse 14, is God unjust? Paul answers both of these for us.

He says we can trust God's promise and he says we can trust that God is good. Present hard-heartedness is not the end of the story of grace.

[9 : 34] So let's look at Paul's two answers. The first of them and our second point for today. We can trust God's word. Verses 6 to 13. Paul's point is that God's word hasn't failed.

Verse 6. That's what he's answering. And again in verse 6 is Paul's reason. He says, not all who are from Israel are Israel.

Again, not all who are born into Israel are true Israel. Not all who have the privileges of the history of Israel and God saving them and making them his are part of true Israel.

just as simply coming along to church and having been baptized doesn't automatically make you a Christian. Paul has already explained this in Romans 2.

He said, for no one is a Jew merely, no one who is a Jew who is merely one outwardly nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the spirit not by the letter.

[10:39] You can have all the external privileges of God's people but if you don't trust Christ, if you don't have faith in his promises, then you're not one of God's people.

That is not the feeling of the promise of salvation. It's what Paul says. Just because a Jew descends from Abraham it does not mean he is a true child of the promises to Israel.

Jews not coming to Jesus is not God's failure. And Paul shows us why with some Old Testament examples. So let's look at the first two of these, verses 7 to 9.

Paul points us all the way back to Genesis and to the two sons of Abraham. Isaac, the child that God had promised to him, and Ishmael, the child that Abraham set about having with a mistress and trying to jump the gun on God's promise.

Verse 7, Paul says it is through Isaac that God's promise will continue. It was not both sons. It was not being a child of Abraham that made someone a true Israelite.

[11:45] Both Isaac and Ishmael were Abraham's sons, but the promise continues through Isaac. He was the child of promise. He was the miracle. He was the child promised to the barren old Sarah.

And God delivered on that promise. God was working to safeguard that promise. And that didn't mean that Ishmael had to be a part of it. Second example, verses 10 to 13, we move on to Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau, the next generation in this family.

This example is slightly different. Both brothers are the same parents. They share parents. But we read in verse 11, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, God had already chosen one of them to continue his promise.

It wasn't the conventional choice of blessing the oldest son. God chose the younger one to show beyond doubt that it is God who chooses in this.

It's God who chooses and works his promises. God acts to keep them. It is not God feeling when people don't follow him.

[13:01] We see from this that God chooses independently of heritage, of privilege, and of behavior. There's no precondition or prerequisite that means God will choose us.

It's not that you or I are more or less likely to believe or behave. It's his choice. He knows his gospel promises. It is only the sovereign choice of God that sees him soften us to follow him.

To see him as he truly is. And because it is his choice, we know that he will keep his promises of salvation. He will. And God's promise of salvation does stand.

We can trust it. When he promises that the gospel is the power of God for salvation, he means it. The gospel does save.

He will save. And because he does, we can trust that he knows what he's doing. He chose Jacob so that his purpose of choosing people for salvation might continue.

[14:09] He's working out his will so that all who will believe will believe. The Jews not believing is not God's failure.

My brother not believing is not God feeling. God will be God what else does Paul say? The next two examples show us that we can trust that God is good.

Final point, we can trust that God is good, verses 14 to 18. This point runs alongside all that Paul's been saying, verses 6 to 13. Promise continues.

Those who are true Israel are those who believe, not just those born into a certain family. God doesn't choose people on their family merit. His gospel does not feel because some Israelites don't believe.

So the heckler's next question, well, is there injustice on God's part then? Verse 14. Is there injustice on God's part?

[15:13] By no means, says Paul. His answer continues with two more examples, this time from Exodus in verses 15 and 16. After the whole debacle of the golden calf, we read that God's wrath was ready to burn hot against Israel.

Moses pleads with God to know that his presence will stay with the Israelites after the rejection of him. And God's response to Moses is what Paul quotes here in verse 15.

I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. mercy is God's right.

God is God and we are not his judge. We are not entitled to mercy otherwise it's not mercy. So question, how many of the Israelites deserve to be spared from the golden calf incident?

Or, how many people deserve to have their sin overlooked, their punishment ignored, and be rewarded with heaven? None. Answer, none.

[16:27] Should we be worried and frightened and aggrieved that God doesn't have mercy on all? Wrong question. Should we wonder, delight, enjoy, and have gratitude that he has mercy to save any?

Correct question. Answer, yes. Verse 15, I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will show mercy and whom I will show mercy.

The context is nobody deserved it. Nobody deserved it, but God still says he will show mercy. God chose to spare some when everyone in Israel decided to ignore him and follow a false God.

God chooses to save people now when none of us deserve it. He is incredibly merciful to have saved even one of us here today. He is good.

He does save people. Verse 16, is it because of our desire or work or effort that God saves? No, it's solely dependent on his mercy.

[17:41] In these examples, we see how important God's promise to his people is through Isaac, how important God's choosing his people is through Jacob, but in the golden calf, we see how utterly essential it is for God to have mercy.

God is merciful to save people. He does save. God is good. Fourth example, Pharaoh, verses 17 to 18.

The king who kept God's people imprisoned. Pharaoh is told that God made him king of Egypt and hardened his heart in the midst of all the plagues so that God's power would be seen.

Pharaoh was hardened so that God's power to save would be seen. So people would see who the real God was and is. And so people would see that he has mercy and that he rescues.

Pharaoh's demise served to exalt God. The whole event of freeing God's people in Exodus made known the world over of God's wonderful saving power, of God's wonderful mercy.

[18:59] God knows what he is doing and he is good. Through Pharaoh, the tragic case of Pharaoh, many people came to know of God's power and God's mercy.

So what does this add to my struggle with unbelieving family? How does this help with those closest to me that don't believe even though they've heard the gospel?

God hardens people. Come on Paul, how does that help? Well, because God is God and his chief concern is his own glory.

But that is good because his glory is best seen in his saving people. That's what he offers in the gospel which is the power of God for salvation to all who believe.

If God hardens us, we might ask, how can it be our responsibility that we don't believe? Well, our decisions don't run at a clash with God.

[20:00] It's not a 50% our decision and 50% his decision. It is us and him both 100% responsible. an example.

We read amongst the plagues at different points with Pharaoh that he hardened his own heart. But we also read in the plagues that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. The hardening is as much Pharaoh's as it is God's.

But as we see that God does harden some, we also see that he has mercy on some. Yes, God saves undeserving people are saved.

Not one person deserves this. Everyone deserves Pharaoh's fate. That's the starting point with these questions. Not one of the golden calf survivors deserved it.

None of us here deserve it. And Romans 1-3 rams that home to us. None of us deserve grace, yet God saves.

[21:03] And because it is his work and choice, the gospel is guaranteed not to fail. It will never be down to us being inferior at explaining and arguing for the gospel.

Our family and those closest to us will not miss out on the gospel because we aren't clever enough or we haven't tried some gimmick to persuade them.

No. God saves people. He is God. We don't put him in the dock. He is God but he is also good and he knows what's best.

Present hardening is not the end of the story. Paul finishes this section in Romans in chapter 11 and in it he explains that the present hardness of the Jews has served to save the Gentiles. That includes us. Then Paul says jealousy of the Gentiles will be provoked in the Jews to see the wonderful salvation that they're missing. In short he says present hardness is not the end of the story of grace.

[22 : 16] God has not failed. He is in the business of saving. We know that as long as we proclaim the gospel then some of those who hear it will be saved. That's so encouraging.

Undeserving people will be saved. We trust God to work in opening hearts to him and he does it. No one is too hardened to the gospel to believe as long as they have breath in their lungs. No one is beyond hope because if God wills it they will believe.

So my brother Jamie is hardened now but I know that God saves people. He seems too hardened but all it takes is God working to save him opening his eyes and pointing him to the Lord Jesus and he would be saved in an instant.

Your loved one is not beyond hope because God is in the business of saving even though none of us deserve it. We have a wonderful hope because God is in the business of saving.

[23 : 34] We can trust the gospel. We can trust that he is good because God would be completely just to punish us all but he is merciful and gracious and he saves many.

God saves many. let's pray. Father we do rejoice in the wonderful gospel that you have given to us in the Lord Jesus.

We rejoice that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. We rejoice that you offer this salvation to us. You are a God great in mercy and great in grace.

We thank you for this and pray in Jesus name. And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Amen.