

## True Israel Romans 9: 6 – 7

- In the first 8 chapters of the book of Romans, Paul has proclaimed God's work in our salvation. It begins with Paul asserting this:

**Romans 1: 16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

- From there, Paul goes on to tell us why the Gospel has power for salvation. It is because our salvation is a work of God from beginning to end.

**Romans 8:30** those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

- And because it is God's work that is the power for our salvation, our salvation is sure and certain.

**Romans 8: 38 – 39** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- This is Paul's message to his readers in the first half of the book of Romans. It is God who saves, and if God promises to save someone, they will be saved.
- But for Paul's readers of that day, that claim raises huge questions. Didn't God promise to save Israel, through a special relationship with them as His chosen people? What happened? Why aren't Israelites flocking to Jesus and becoming Christians?
  - Think what was happening in Paul's day. The original Christians were Jews, and as they began to obey the Great Commission by witnessing to their Jewish family members, Jewish friends, and Jewish neighbors, they met resistance.
    - Since the promises of the Messiah were to Israel and since Jesus was that Messiah, it would seem natural that everyone they witnessed to should have been willing to embrace Jesus, as Messiah, as Lord and Savior.
    - But many Jews did not, and in fact, many became hostile toward the church and to Christians. In fact, if you look at church history, the earliest persecution of Christians came from their fellow Jews.
    - If you were a Jewish Christian in that time, faithfully sharing the Gospel with your family, friends, and neighbors, and repeatedly seeing them be unresponsive to the message of the Gospel, you couldn't help but wonder, "What's up with that? Has God's promise failed?"
  - Can you imagine the severe disappointment of these early Jewish Christians? Paul even expressed the disappointment that he felt here in Romans 9:

**Romans 9: 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. <sup>4</sup>They are Israelites (who received all the blessings and promises of God).

- If they were God’s chosen people, and God gave them all of these blessings to bring the Messiah to them, then why do they refuse to respond to the Gospel? Doesn’t their failure to respond to the Gospel, prove that Paul is wrong in his theology?
  - Doesn’t Israel’s refusal to come to Jesus prove that man can thwart God’s plan? This is what Paul is addressing here in chapters 9 – 11 of Romans.
  - To address that question and defend his theology, as well as defend the work of God, Paul will lay out a series of arguments to prove what He is saying is right, and more importantly that God’s ways are right.

**Romans 9: 6 – 13** But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, <sup>7</sup>and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” <sup>10</sup>And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, <sup>11</sup>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— <sup>12</sup>she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” <sup>13</sup>As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

- You won’t hear too many sermons on these verses in most churches because it seems to go against the God that we want to have.
  - As if we can invent a God of our choosing. I mean really, if you can make up God to be whatever you want Him to be, then you are god. If you are able to create God, then you must be the creator.
    - The Bible claims to be the Word of God. God’s revelation to us. If we want to claim Psalm 23, or Romans 8: 30, or John 3: 16, then we have to claim Romans 9: 13 too; don’t we? It is all or nothing. Either the whole Bible is true, or the whole Bible is a lie.
    - We don’t get to pick and choose our truth, based on whether we like it or not. If we believe the Bible is true, then we must accept the truths and deal with them, even if we don’t understand them completely or necessarily like them at first glance.
- So, we are going to do our best to unpack the truths of these verses over the next couple of weeks, and if you engage and really think about what Paul is saying, I believe that you will come to not only accept the truth, but to actually rejoice in it.
  - Why? Because these truths really just further make the point that what we have in Christ is all grace—a gift from God. And the more we understand that, the more we will rejoice in grace and be transformed by grace.
  - So, over the next few weeks, as we explore these verses, my hope is that each of you will open your mind, and open your heart to receive this truth and be renewed in your mind and heart, so that you are transformed by it.



Now, it will be a few weeks before we get to Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. Before we get there, we have to understand the foundation that Paul is laying for us. So, this week our focus will be on:

**Romans 9: 6** But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel...

- Now, as we think about that verse, I want you to think about a baseball team, or softball team of 9- and 10-year-old kids. On that team, you have kids who don't really care about baseball all that much, but they are on the team.
- Some are on the team because they like the uniform and being part of a team with their friends. Some are on the team because they are trying to please their dads. Some have no idea why they are on the team and go out in the outfield and pick dandelions or hunt for dinosaur bones.
- But there are a few, a very small few, who are on the team because they love baseball. They watch it on TV with dad, they play catch with dad every chance they get. They don't care about a uniform. They just want to play baseball.
  - Just having the uniform, just being on the team, isn't what makes a kid a baseball player. It is a love for baseball that makes the kid a baseball player.
- Now if you get that image in mind, you begin to understand what Paul is saying here. Just because you were born into ethnic Israel, and as a result are part of God's chosen people, with the covenant promises, the Law, the Temple and its worship, with the patriarchs, and even with the glory of the Lord in close proximity to where you live and work, that doesn't necessarily make you a true Israelite.
- Now we can take that one step further, and also put it into our context; can't we? Just because you were born into a Christian family, and just because you have a Bible, and just because you go to church, and just because you know your theology and been baptized, that doesn't necessarily make you a true Christian, does it?

### **1. Many are called but few are chosen.**

- At first glance it may seem like what Paul's arguing in verse 6 is an argument from desperation. But it is nothing of the sort.
  - The distinction that Paul is making here goes back to the time of Abraham and we'll see that more clearly next week.
  - But even as you look at more recent Jewish history, that is its history before the time of Christ, the prophets made this contrast clear by showing that there was a distinct difference between Israel as a nation and a remnant who would be saved.
    - After the reign of King Solomon ended, around 930 BC, the kingdom of Israel became divided between the ten northern tribes and Judah, David's tribe. The Northern tribes turned away from God completely and

in 721 BC, the Assyrians overwhelmed them and carried them off into exile.

- After the Kingdom split, Judah vacillated between being faithful to God and turning away from God. So, it wasn't until 586 BC that the Babylonians would come in and overthrow the southern part of the Kingdom which is Judah. They too were taken into exile, but one day a remnant would return, and out of that remnant would come the Messiah.
- In the years leading up to the exile, Israel as a nation was apostate and it turned away from God and only a few Jews gave any indication of being among God's genuine people. But God protected a remnant for the purpose of fulfilling the Covenant promise that He made to Abraham that through Abraham's offspring all the families of the earth would be blessed.

**Isaiah 10:22** Though your people be like the sand by the sea, Israel, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous.

**Isaiah 37:31** Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above.

**Isaiah 37:32** For out of Jerusalem will come a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

- Even as we come to the time of Jesus, Israel as a nation was going about its business with little true faith at all, just as most people both Jew and Gentile do today.
- At the time of Jesus, the Jews would have said that they were a people of faith. But in truth, they were a people of religion, as Jesus put it, in Matthew 15:9, a people of "Laws taught by men," rather than a people of faith.
  - it was only a few individuals, like Joseph and Mary, Elizabeth and Zechariah, Simeon and Anna who were, in faith, looking forward to the coming of a Messiah, and the redemption of Jerusalem.
- When Jesus appeared on the scene and began his ministry, he too made a distinction. We see Jesus make this very distinction, between Israel and true Israel, as he begins his ministry by calling his disciples.

**John 1: 45** Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." <sup>46</sup> Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." <sup>47</sup> Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

- Isn't this the exact same distinction that Paul is making here in Romans 9:6? There were Israelites, people who wore the uniform and were on the team, and then there were true Israelites.
- The fact of the matter is that Romans 9 is not the first place that Paul makes this distinction in the book of Romans.

**Romans 2: 28** For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.

- Being a true Israelite is not about religion that produces an outward change, but about faith that produces an internal change—a change of the heart.
  - Now we begin to see clearly what Paul means when he says not all Israel is Israel. Circumcision was the outward mark of the covenant people, but it didn't change them inwardly. Circumcision like other religious ceremonies, say baptism, has value only if it corresponds to an internal transformation. It is the heart that truly must be circumcised, or to put it in terms of baptism—washed clean.
  - God doesn't care about outward appearance. God cares about the heart.

## **2. What it meant to be a true Israelite.**

- To be an Israelite meant that a person had special privileges and special advantages over anyone who was not an Israelite.
  - To be an Israelite meant having a special relationship with God.
  - It meant the glory of God dwelling in your midst.
  - It meant having special communications from God, in which the covenant promises, and the law of God were made known to you, so that you had a clear understanding of what God promised to do for you, and what God expected you to do.
  - It meant having the temple worship and the sacrifice, so that you could clearly see that in order to approach God you needed both a priest and a sacrifice.
  - It meant having all the prophetic promises and all the patriarchs who pointed the way to the Messiah.
- But all the special privileges and special advantages were not enough, in and of themselves, to bring salvation.
- What was needed for salvation? There's only one answer. It is saving faith in Jesus as the son of God and savior.
  - For an Old Testament Jew, it meant believing in God's promise that he would send a Redeemer.
  - For a New Testament church member, it is believing in the redeeming work that was done by Jesus on your behalf.
    - Paul has already shown the prime example of both Old Testament and New Testament faith in the example of Abraham in Romans 4.

**Romans 4: 22** That is why (Abraham's) faith was "counted to him as righteousness." <sup>23</sup> But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, <sup>25</sup> who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

- We know that Abraham was not saved by performing religious rituals like circumcision, because God had already declared him to be righteous in

Genesis 15, years before God ever gave the command for Abraham to be circumcised in Genesis 17.

- We know that Abraham was not saved by keeping the law because as you read the account of his life, he didn't always keep the law. In fact, the law had not even yet been given, and it would not be until 400 years later.
- There is no way that Abraham could be justified through religion or through the Law. So how was Abraham saved? By faith—that's what God counted to him as righteousness. That's what made the father of the Israelites—a true Israelite.
- Think what happened with Abraham. God called Abraham, and then in faith Abraham followed.
  - ◆ Biologically speaking Abraham is the father of all Israelites, but spiritually he is the father only of those with faith like his.

**Galatians 3: 7** Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

- Those who in faith come to God as God calls them to himself; they were and are the true Israelites.

### 3. True Christians

- In the same way there are many in our world today who bear the name Christian. In fact, it wasn't that long ago that America was considered a Christian nation. Why were we called that? Because at least culturally many claimed the name Christian and believed generally in a Christian morality.
  - But cultural Christianity and true Christianity are no more the same thing than being in Israelite by birth versus being a true Israelite.
    - The title Christian actually gives us the definition of what it means to be a true Christian. Christian literally means a Christ one.
      - The first time the name Christian was applied to followers of Christ was in a town called Antioch.

**Acts 11: 26** And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians

- ◆ In the ancient Roman world, Antioch was known as a place of depravity. But there God planted a body of true believers who became known as Christ ones—Christians.
- ◆ This wasn't what Christians called themselves.
- ◆ And, it wasn't what Jews would have called these believers because Christ means Messiah and the Jews did not recognize Christ as Messiah.
- ◆ No, the name Christian that was applied to these believers in Antioch was given to them by the pagans. Why did the pagans refer to believers in this way? Because these people loved Christ and followed so closely after Christ that as the pagan world watched them, they couldn't help but think of Jesus.
  - That's quite a testimony; isn't it? Does the world say the same about us?



- There was no such thing as a cultural Christian in Paul's day. To be a Christian meant to be persecuted. No one would desire to be a Christian in name only.
  - These early Christians believed in Christ to the point where they followed Christ, bore witness for Christ, and continued to grow in Christ, even in the face of severe persecution.
- To be a true Israelite meant that a person believed the promises God had made regarding the Messiah who was to come. To be a true Christian means to believe that the Messiah has come in the person of Jesus Christ who is the son of God. To be a true Christian starts with a belief that:

**Galatians 4: 4** when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

- Do you believe that? Do you believe that God sent his son to be cut off and die for your sin and that his death fully paid the price for your sin so that you could be brought into the family and be adopted as a child of God? If you do, then you are at the starting point of faith.
- But belief is only the starting point of true faith. Belief is just in the head. The longest distance known to man is the distance between the head and the heart. It only seems to measure about 18", but in reality, it is the difference between heaven and hell.
  - If what you believe in your head doesn't change the heart, then you do not truly have faith.
    - How do you know that Abraham had faith? When God came to Abraham and made the promise to him, Abraham spent the rest of his life intensely and intentionally pursuing that promise. God said go and be blessed, and Abraham got up and went, pursuing the blessing.
- A true Christian is a person whose knowledge of Jesus and what Jesus has done for them, enflames their heart in such a way that they have a gazelle-like intensity to follow hard after Jesus.
  - (Gazelle-like intensity is the kind of intensity a gazelle has when a cheetah is trying to make the gazelle his dinner.)
- Do you think I am over the top in saying this? Placing too strong of a demand? Listen to what Jesus said.

**Luke 14: 33** any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

- Do you know what that is? Gazelle like intensity. Paul made the point in Romans 4 that we are to have faith like Abraham.
  - What kind of faith did Abraham have? A faith of gazelle-like intensity. God said get up and go, leave your country, leave your family and I will bless you. So, what did Abraham do? He got up and went.

- Jesus is saying to each of us, “Come and follow me. Forgive as I have forgiven you. Be merciful, as I have shown mercy to you. Love, as I have loved you.” Are you doing that?

- In Antioch, the pagans saw their friends changing right before their eyes. Why? Because their friends who had become Christians were no longer following the ways of the world but rather were following Christ with an intensity and an intentionality that made them stand out as different from the world around them.

- Now I want you to notice that I added a word there that is very important. It’s a word that makes Christian gazelle-like intensity very different from just normal gazelle-like intensity.
  - Think about gazelle-like intensity. All the gazelle is doing is trying to get away from the cheetah. It is not running to anything. It is just running away hoping the cheetah gets worn out before it does.
    - But a Christian isn’t just running away from the world—a Christian is running to Jesus. There is an intention to the intensity.
      - Christians in name only go through the motions. They follow Christian morality; they perform the Christian rituals. But a true Christians intensely and intentionally live out their faith—following hard after Jesus.
  - Satan and the world have no power over you when you run to Jesus and stand at the foot of the cross. When Satan attacks like a roaring lion, when sin crouches at your door, when failures come, when sin entangles and entraps, when people fail you, when all hope seems gone, intentionally and intensely run to Jesus. Run to the cross.
    - Why does the cross have so much power? Because at the cross there is hope for every disappointment, there is forgiveness for every sin, and at the cross there is power, because at the cross Jesus defeated Satan, sin, and death.
      - We are not just like the gazelle desperately trying to run away from the world—away from Satan. You have to run to something.
      - God doesn’t call us to flee from the world or even to flee from Satan. God calls us to:

**James 4: 7** Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

- How do you submit to God? By coming and kneeling at the foot of the cross and letting the grace and mercy of Christ wash over you.
- The more you look at Jesus and consider the mercy and love he has shown to you, the more you will become like Jesus living a life of mercy and love that will mark you out as being different from the world around you.
- Intentionally seek each day to take the love and mercy of Jesus’ into your heart. That is what will give you the gazelle-like intensity to follow hard after him, and that is what will mark you out as a true-Israelite—a true child of God.