

## With Arms Wide Open

### Romans 10: 21

**Isaiah 55: 8 – 9** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. 9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

- If we ever need proof that those words are true, all we need to do is turn to the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans. In chapter 9, Paul writes about election and predestination:

**Romans 9: 15** "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

- The next verse tells us exactly what those words mean:

**Romans 9: 16** So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

- With what he writes in chapter 9, Paul couldn't be any clearer, could he?

**Jonah 2: 9** Salvation belongs to the Lord!

- But in Romans 10, in a seemingly complete reversal of what he said in chapter 9, Paul spends the whole chapter speaking about human responsibility.
  - Human responsibility to call on the Lord for salvation.

**Romans 10: 13** Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

- And to be saved, Paul tells us that a person has a responsibility to:

**Romans 10: 9** confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved

- Many people look at what Paul writes in Romans 9 and what he writes in chapter 10 and see these two things as hopelessly irreconcilable doctrines that just don't fit together at all.
  - And in our human nature and our desire to have everything comprehensible and fitting into neat boxes, what do we do?
    - ♦ Some slay God's sovereignty in election on the altar of human responsibility, and some slay the doctrine of human responsibility on the altar of God's sovereignty in election.
  - Now, it shouldn't surprise most of you to hear me say this, but that is wrong. We can't do that. We have to accept and seek to understand the word of God as it is written, not how we want it to be written.
- The Biblical fact of the matter is that God's sovereignty in election and personal responsibility are two truths that mutually support one another and must always be held together, as Paul does here in Romans. In fact, God's sovereignty in election is the solution to the problem of human responsibility.
- It is a terrible thing and a burdensome thing to be responsible for something you are unable to do. We are responsible to call out to God for salvation but apart from God's intervening work in our life our hearts of stones are incapable of doing that. But none the less, we are still responsible.
  - As humans God created us and gifted us with all the qualifications, we needed to do the job, but then when we sinned, we became incapacitated

and unable to perform up to standard. The only choices God had was to either fire us or find a way to rehab us so we once again could do the job.

- Each of us are completely responsible for the choices we make that led us to sin and failure to live up to what God made us to be. But we are not responsible for our salvation. That is a work that only God can do.
  - The truth the Bible teaches is that we are totally responsible for being lost, but God alone is responsible for our being found. And if you stop and really think about it, that makes complete sense.
- As we look at the progression of Paul's writing it goes like this: First, human responsibility; Second, the perverse exercise of human responsibility in rejecting God; And third, salvation by God's sovereign grace.
- To conclude his point in all of this, in the last verse of Romans 10, Paul shows us what happens when the only working element in man's relationship to God is human responsibility. The result is unbelief.
  - Verse 21 shows us that when God only makes use of outward means to call men to himself, without also regenerating their hearts, men will continue to turn away from God rather than turn to God.

**Romans 10: 21** But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

- Paul is quoting the words God spoke through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 65: 2. Isaiah was a prophet to Israel during her time of great decline into exile. These words of God are an indictment against Israel for Israel's unbelief, in spite of all that God had done for them.

### **1. The nature of God's love: outstretched hands**

- We repeatedly see God's outstretched hands to Israel in the Old Testament.
  - It was God's outstretched hands that led Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to what would later be known as the Promised Land.
  - It was God's outstretched hand that spared the life of Abraham's son Isaac by providing a substitute to be sacrificed in his place.
  - The outstretched hand of God subdued Jacob making him the Father of Israel.
  - Joseph one of Jacob's sons would be sustained in Egypt by the hand of God, so that all of his family could survive during a time of famine.
  - It was the hand of God that delivered Moses and the Israelites from slavery in Egypt into the freedom of the Promised Land.

**Deuteronomy 7:19** You saw with your own eyes the great trials, the signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm, with which the Lord your God brought you out. The Lord your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear.

- The outstretched hand of God took David from the field to the palace.

**2 Samuel 7: 8 – 9** "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. <sup>9</sup>I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth.

- In fact, listen how God portrayed his outstretched hands to His people:

**Hosea 11: 1- 4** When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. <sup>2</sup> The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. <sup>3</sup> Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. <sup>4</sup> I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them.

- In all of these examples, we see the outstretched hands of God to a sinful people—inviting them to come and find rest for their weary souls in Him. Many Old Testament individuals did, but Israel as a whole did not.
- Jesus pictured these outstretched hands of God in the Parable of the Prodigal Son that we find in Luke 15. In the parable, a man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.” And he divided his property between them.
  - The younger son took his share and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. And one day he woke up and found himself in a pigpen longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat.

**Luke 15: 17** “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ <sup>20</sup> And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

- As we saw in those verses from Hosea, as we see in this parable of the prodigal, the outstretched hands of God is the gesture of a parent reaching out to a child, to teach them how to walk, hold them in a warm embrace.
- Outstretched hands are also the gesture of Jesus, the Son of God, who reached out to us from the cross. If you want to know what the hands of God are like, think of Jesus and his hands. They are often portrayed in the gospels.
  - For example, one day Jesus was approached by a leper. Lepers were people that no one would touch but in Matthew 8: 3 we are told:

**Matthew 8: 3** Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.

- On another occasion, two blind men asked Jesus for healing:

**Matthew 9: 29 – 30** Then he touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith let it be done to you”; <sup>30</sup> and their sight was restored.

- And of course, you remember the account of Peter trying to walk to Jesus over the water, as Jesus had invited him to do. But when Peter looked around and saw the crashing waves and the gusting wind, he lost faith and began to sink, it was the outstretched hand of Jesus that saved him

**Matthew 14: 30 – 31** (Peter cried out) “Lord, save me!” <sup>31</sup> Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

- With outstretched hands, Jesus also welcomed small children into his embrace and blessed them.

**Mark 10: 16** And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

- Jesus' hands were always healing, always blessing, always saving. They are the hands of compassion. On the cross they were stretched out, and they were pierced for our transgressions.

**Isaiah 53: 5** he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

- It has been said that no other God has wounds, and it is true. Only a God like ours who is loving and compassionate would stretch out his hands to be pierced for our sins.
- But what has been the response to God's outstretched hands? What was Israel's response? What is our response?

**Romans 10: 21** But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

## 2. Israel's disobedient and contrary heart

- Israel is the prime example of how over and over again man has chosen to push the outstretched hands of God away.
  - Look at the two words that Paul uses to describe Israel's reaction to the outstretched hands of God—disobedient and contrary.
- In our modern western Christianity, we tend to think of the gospel as an invitation. There is reason to think that way. Think of Jesus' words in:

**Matthew 11: 28** "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

- In fact, the Bible ends with an invitation

**Revelation 22: 17** "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

- So, it is easy for us to forget that the gospel is also a command. A command, from Jesus himself, to repent and believe.

**Mark 1: 14 – 15** Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup>"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

- To repent of sin and believe is not a suggestion, it's not an invitation, it is a command from Jesus that continues today.
- A command that Paul restated as he preached to the Greeks in Athens. He ended his address on Mars Hill by saying:

**Acts 17: 30** In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

- Peter gives the same command on the day of Pentecost, saying:

**Acts 2: 38** Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

- In demonstration of His great love for us, God stands with outstretched hands. The outstretched hands are a welcoming invitation to find our life in Him. But the only way we can accept the invitation is through repentance and faith.
  - Repentance and faith is to turn from ourselves and our sin (that's the repentance part) and turn to God (that's the faith part). But because of our sinful nature that action of repenting and believing goes against every fiber of

our human nature. We are a proud self-sufficient people. So rather than turning toward the outstretched hands of God we turn away.

- We can clearly see this is true in Israel's history.
  - Within days of God leading them out of Egypt, with a mighty hand, Israel rejected God and fashioned a golden calf to worship instead.
  - Very shortly after God established David's kingdom as a dynasty, David turned from God's outstretched hands and sinned with Bathsheba. Whether it is Israel as a nation or individuals, the pattern repeats itself again and again.
  - God sums up Israel's relationship with Him very well in:

**Hosea 11: 1 – 2** "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. <sup>2</sup>But the more they were called, the more they went away from me.

- Now we must stop and ask ourselves, are we really any different from Israel? We are the same kind of people, living in the same kind of world, and, whether we realize it or not, we often act in the exact same way.

**Isaiah 53: 6** We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way.

*"There is nothing we resist so much as a command, no command we resist so much is a command given to us by God, and no command given to us by God that we reject so much as the command to repent and turn to Jesus". James Montgomery Boice*

- Why are we this way—so disobedient to God's command to repent and believe? Because it is so naturally ingrained into our sinful nature, into our hearts of stone that are dead in sin. The natural desire of our heart is to turn away from God.
- But we are not only disobedient to the command to repent and believe, but we are also stubborn, contrary in that disobedience. What does it mean to be contrary?
  - To be contrary is to be stubborn in our rebelliousness.
  - How are we stubborn? By digging in our heels and refusing to come to the outstretched hands of God.
- Again, let's go back to Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. The main point of the parable isn't about the wayward son, it is actually about the elder brother. The main point of Jesus' parable is the reaction of the elder brother, as the father holds a joyous celebration for the return of the prodigal.

**Luke 15 25 - 30** "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. <sup>27</sup> And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' <sup>28</sup> But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, <sup>29</sup> but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

- For the second time in the parable, we see the father's outstretched hands to his son, this time the elder son—inviting him, imploring him to come and join the celebration. But what is the response of the elder son? It is, in obstinance and rebellion to push the outstretched hands of the father away.
- Why did the elder brother feel this way?



- Look at his statement in verse 39, “Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.”
- He was self righteous. Rather than being focused on the outstretched hands of his father, he was focused on himself. He had a surface obedience to the father to try to get what he wanted from the father, but it clearly wasn’t an obedience of love.
  - Think about your obedience. Is it a loving obedience, or a manipulative obedience? Is it focused on God or self?
- The interaction of these two boys in Jesus’ parable is a vivid picture of:

**Romans 10: 20 – 21** Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, “I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.” <sup>21</sup> But of Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”

- The wayward younger brother came home not expecting to find the outstretched hands of his father, but there they were, and he fell into the father’s embrace. The outstretched arms of the father are there for the older brother too, but in disobedient pride the older brother pushes them away.
  - Think of why Jesus told that parable.

**Luke 15: 1** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

- The tax collectors and sinners were the younger brothers who had turned away from God to go their own way. They didn’t expect to find outstretched hands, but they did.
- The older brother represents the religious Jews of Jesus’ day who in their pride thought they had earned their place with the father.
- As you think about the parable neither boy wanted the father simply for who he was. They both just wanted what they thought the father could give them.
  - In blatant rebellion the younger brother says to the father, “I wish you were dead. I don’t want you. I just want the inheritance.” The younger brother represents irreligious people who turn away from God’s outstretched hands because they want life without God.
  - The older brother represents religious people who simply want to use God to get what they want. The older brother didn’t slave away for the father out of love. It was to get a young goat, so he could party with his friends. He didn’t want his father’s embrace, just the goat.
    - Imagine trading the loving embrace of the father for a young goat. How silly. How foolish.
    - But isn’t it what we do all of the time? In stubborn rebellion, we are constantly pushing away the outstretched hands of God to chase after some other thing that we think will satisfy us. Some other thing, that may not seem like it at the time, but in reality, is as silly as a young goat.
- Some of you are here this morning and you are mad at God because you think God owes you for all your years of slaving away for him. But you haven’t really been slaving away for God out of love for God. You have been slaving away trying

to get God to give you what you want. Like the older brother, your desire isn't for the Father it is for what you think the Father will give you.

- But most of us are pushing away the outstretched hands of God day in and day out without even realizing it. Instead of coming to the outstretched hands of God we are chasing after happiness, security, peace, comfort.

*We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.*

*We are far too easily pleased.”— C.S. Lewis, **The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses***

- We are so busy and so attracted to the mud pies of this life that we are oblivious to the outstretched hands that God is holding out to us.
  - If I polled you, my guess is that everyone here would say they desire to go to heaven someday. Why? For some of you it is just simply because it beats the alternative of hell.
  - But for many it is because we want the joys of heaven-comfort, security, peace, reunions with family. But what is the real joy of heaven?

**Revelation 21: 3 – 4** “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

- The real joy of heaven is to be the prodigal in the embrace of the true loving father for all of eternity. If that is eternity, then why not start enjoying it today? God is standing there with outstretched hands. The only thing keeping you from his loving embrace is you.

### **3. A time for choosing**

**Romans 10: 21** “All day long I have held out my hands

- God pictures himself holding out his hands toward Israel for an entire day.
  - Have you ever tried to hold out your hands for even a few minutes? It's very tiring. Very few persons could hold out their hands for even an hour. No one can do it for a day. Yet God says he has done this continuously “All day long I held up my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.”
    - With God 1000 years is as a day and a day is as 1000 years.
- If we start with Abraham, we can say the day of God's grace has already lasted for over 4000 years. It is still continuing today. The day of grace has not ended, and it will not end until Jesus returns the final time for judgment.
  - But we each need to think of this in personal terms. The day of God's grace has been continuous for you too. How many times have you heard those words repent and believe the gospel? Have you ever responded? Are you responding each day? The way we fall into those outstretched hands each day is in repentance and faith.

**Colossians 2: 6** Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him

- Think how continuous and long-suffering the grace of God has been for you. Think of all the times that you have pushed those outstretched hands of God away to pursue some other thing.
  - Maybe you're here today and you are like the younger brother. You have pushed God away and gone off to try to live life on your own, and now you are waking up finding your life to be a mess. The reason your life is a mess is because you are trying to live life apart from God. Look up and see the outstretched hands of God for you at Calvary's cross.
    - ♦ No matter how badly you have messed up, God sees it all, and like the Father with the Prodigal his hands are outstretched waiting for you to come home. God sees you where you are and loves you.

**1 John 4: 9 – 11** This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

- ♦ Today is the day that you can come home and fall into his embrace. Repent and believe the Gospel that in His infinite love for you, God sent his son to the cross to die for you, so that you could belong to him forever.
- Maybe you are here today, and you are the older brother—thinking that God owes you because you are better than others. What more do you want God to give you other than Himself? There is nothing greater, nothing more satisfying. Look to the cross and see how God gave himself there for you. Why would you want a young goat, or anything else, when you can have a love like that?
  - ♦ Take a closer look at those outstretched hands. See them as Thomas did. Hear Jesus say to you as he said to Thomas in:

**John 20: 27** "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

- ♦ What happened when Thomas did that? All his doubts, rebellion, and disobedience melted away, and all he could say was:

**John 20: 28** "My Lord and my God!"

- ♦ As Thomas saw those outstretched nail scarred hands and believed, what happened? He fell into the embrace of God.
- God's hands are outstretched to each of you today. Come into the loving embrace of God by repenting and believing the Gospel.