

1 Romans: The Road Less Traveled

- Session 7: The Road to the Promised Land - (Romans 9-11)

2 Table Talk

- What insights have you gained thus far in our study of Romans?
- How would you summarize Paul's "gospel" in Romans?
- What questions were raised in your reading of Romans 9-11?

3 Romans 9-11

- Paul's discussion of Israel is not a simple "excursus" or aside in the full argument of Romans
- These chapters are often misunderstood, as though the story of Israel was just an advanced (and now defunct) abstract of salvation and the Christian ethical code
- Paul is not a supercessionist, believing that God has abandoned Israel in favor of the Church.
- He is writing to largely Gentile house churches in Rome who may have those ideas, but given his argument to this point that the gospel is for both Jews and Gentiles, Paul wants to clarify his understanding of Israel's purpose and destiny.

4 Purpose of Romans 9-11

- Theological purpose: God's covenant
- Key Question: Can God really be trusted if he seems to have gone back on his word to his people?
- Practical Purpose: Christians must not think that God has abandoned the Jewish people, as though the Christian movement would be for Gentiles only.
- Key Question: How do we understand the relationship of God and Israel on the other side of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

5 Structure

- Chiasm - Developing a structured argument or set of statements and then repeating and developing it in reverse order
- Structured much like a Psalm - begins with lament and ends with praise
- Retelling the story of Israel in a way that puts it within the grand sweep of God's purpose for the whole creation

7 Paul's Lament

- End of Chapter 8 - Nothing can separate us from the love of God
- And yet, at the beginning of Chapter 9, Paul has sorrow over his own people, his "kindred according to the flesh" - Paul wishes that he could be "accursed and cut off from Christ" for their sake (echo of Moses, Exodus 32:30-34)
- The great majority of Paul's Jewish contemporaries have not believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and, therefore, are excluded from salvation.
- 11:13 - Paul is concerned that Gentile Christians in Rome may be happy for Jews to forever remain in that condition
- Paul will push back on supercessionism and anti-Semitism here, pointing to the covenant

8 The Story of Israel (9:4-5)

- To the Israelites belong:
 - Adoption
 - Glory
 - Covenants
 - Giving of the Law
 - Worship
 - Promises
 - Patriarchs

9 Key Takeaways from Romans 9:1-5

- Paul's stance versus subsequent Christian distortions:
 - Reading Romans 9:1-5, it is impossible to engage in anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic rhetoric. Paul is a Jew and remains a Jew, understanding the gospel as the fulfillment of God's promise through Israel's Messiah, Jesus Christ
 - It is also impossible to make Paul's statement compatible with the popular notion that "all religions are equal paths to God." Judaism and Christianity are not separate covenants on parallel tracks. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise through Israel's Messiah

10 God's Plan in Israel's History

- Paul tells the story of Israel from Abraham to the Exile, to make the point that God's word has not failed (v. 6)
- The story of Israel is the root story of the Church
- Israel was always warned that God's purposes would be carried forward through a smaller and smaller remnant until the Gentiles would be included as well (v. 27-29)
- 9:24 - the worldwide Church, with Jew and Gentile belonging together, is the long fulfillment of what God promised to Abraham (Genesis 12)
- We cannot be Marcionites, rejecting the Old Testament - this is our story, too, a story into which Gentiles have been incorporated by the grace of God

11 God's Covenant Faithfulness in the Gospel

- The second half of Paul's telling of Israel's story takes the reader from the Exile up to the Messiah and the renewal of the covenant through him
- Paul's prayer is that Israel may be saved. They have a zeal for God, but they are ignorant of "the righteousness that comes from God" (1:16-17) and have not submitted to it (the righteousness that is available through the Messiah by faith, not through the law)
- For Paul, the whole point of people having their sins forgiven was so that they could join together in a single family who would worship and serve God forever
- That family is joined together and marked out by the confession that "Jesus is Lord" and the heart-belief that God raised him from the dead (10:9)

12 The Heart of Christian Faith

- "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."
- Confessing "Jesus is Lord" - baptismal confession, but also a statement of allegiance leading to the "obedience of faith" (1:5)
- Believing in the heart that God raised him from the dead - Jesus' resurrection demonstrates that he really is the Messiah. The historical event is the linch pin to Christian faith and the turning point of world history.
- Belief in the resurrection is not just to believe in some arbitrary way, but to orient one's life around that belief; an orientation that comes about through the action of the Spirit
- This kind of faith is the sure sign that the gospel has done its work.

13 Salvation and Election

- Salvation - not just "going to heaven when you die" or "get out of hell free" - Salvation is the through-going work of God, delivering people from slavery to Sin and Death, forgiving them of the guilt of sin and, through the Spirit, giving them power over Sin, and enabling them to live out their God-given vocation now and in God's glorious future. We are not just saved from, we are saved for.
- Election - Calvinist determinism - God has predetermined who is saved and who is damned.
- Paul - "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (10:13) - Jew and Greek!
- Salvation comes to its full completion when Christ returns and the dead are raised.

14 Salvation and Election

- Salvation is completed in final form when we are resurrected and conformed to the image of the resurrected Christ
- Paul believes that even the "saved" person faces the danger of unfaithfulness and apostasy in this life (Romans 11:21-22, multiple parallels)
- Paul's letters are primarily about exhorting believers to guard against apostasy, to stay faithful, to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12)
- Paul is not a "once saved, always saved" proponent. We can choose to reject the gift of grace and God honors that choice
- "We are not eternally secure until we are securely in eternity." (Ben Witherington)
- Election is not arbitrary selection of individuals for salvation, it is largely a corporate thing - those who are "in Christ"

15 Evangelism

- The word of the gospel goes forth through those who are sent to proclaim it (v. 14-15)
- Evangelism is introducing people to Christ and the great story of which we are a part. We too often make it about a transaction (say a prayer, go to heaven) than a call to new life in Christ, inviting people to hear the whole good news. It's about becoming part of the family of God through Christ.
- Israel has heard the word about Christ - v. 18-21, quotes from Psalm 19:4; Deuteronomy 13:21; Isaiah 65:1-2
- In effect, Paul says that the Gentiles have received the gospel, while Israel looks on as unbelieving outsiders who are not yet sharing the blessings to which they have looked forward for so long.

16 God's Abiding Faithfulness

- The foregoing leaves Paul in a situation no Jew had faced before: what happens when God fulfills his ancient promises by sending his Messiah, but Israel as a whole looks the other way?
- Roman anti-Semitism might kick in at this point - supposing God has changed his mind and abandoned the Jews so as now to save Gentiles only?
- No - Paul says. There is a remnant of believing Jews, of which he is an obvious example (11:1-10)
- And since they are characterized by grace and faith, this remnant can always increase (11:11-24)

17 God's Abiding Faithfulness

- What's more, even the the "trespass" or "stumble of presently unbelieving Jews (reference to Chapter 5) serves the purpose of Gentile salvation (11:11-12).
- There is every reason to believe that Israel will become "jealous" of what God has done for the Gentiles and thereby come to faith and be saved (v. 13-16).
- Unbelieving Jews are like branches broken off of God's olive tree, while Gentiles are like wild branches grafted in. How much more can God graft back in the natural branches "if they do not remain in unbelief" (v. 17-23)
- Those broken off branches remind the Gentiles that they, too, can be broken off. If God did not spare them, he will not spare you if you do not "continue in his kindness" (v. 21-22)

18 God's Abiding Faithfulness

- There is no room for Gentile feelings of superiority (v. 25)
- A "hardening" has come upon part of Israel until the full number of Gentiles has come in
- v. 26 - "All Israel will be saved."
 - "Israel" for Paul indicates the whole people of God, Jew and Gentile together
 - Both Jews and Gentiles have been disobedient, and both Jews and Gentiles can now receive mercy (v. 28-32). Gentiles have received it only because they are incorporated into Israel's story of disobedience and God's deliverance through their Messiah.

19 The Hope for Israel

- The hope for Israel according to the flesh (ethnic Judaism) is not clinging to its privileged status and hoping that God will make a way of salvation other than through Jesus the Messiah
- The hope of salvation for everyone lies in the Messiah, the Torah's true goal, and in the renewal that is available through him
- There is no two-track system of salvation
- "God's salvation must be found where God has accomplished it, revealed it, and proclaimed it." - N.T. Wright

20 Implications

- We cannot accede to supercessionism or anti-Semitism - we are part of the same family
- Nor can we see the fate of Israel being bound up in returning to the land and rebuilding the Temple as some eschatological harbinger of Jesus' return. Paul does not talk about this at all. Paul's interest here is in Israel as a covenant people, not a political state entity. There may be reasons to support modern day Israel, but that is not Paul's concern here.
- It is important for Christians to understand the Jewish roots of their faith with reverence and respect, and engage our Jewish neighbors with that same reverence and respect.
- Understand the story, speak of your hope in Jesus the Messiah, pray with Paul for softening of hearts, let God and the Spirit handle the rest!
- Be willing to punch the mystery button - God will do what God will do!

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- O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ...For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

22 Assignment

- What are some of the things that Paul urges the church to do as a result of the gospel?
- What questions does the text raise for you?

- How does the text teach us to live out the gospel?

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- Questions?