

Salvation belongs to our God

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[0 : 0 0] Romans chapter 9. As I said this morning, we're continuing to go through the book of John in the morning, John chapter 14. The latter part is what will be on next Sunday. Actually, we won't be because I'm teaching in Sunday school, but when I'm not, we will be there. But in the evenings, we will still be on Romans. So Romans chapter 9 this evening, and the first 29 verses.

Romans 29 verses 1 through to, sorry, Romans 9 verses 1 through to 29. Okay, now hear God's word.

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, worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs.

From their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God overall, blessed forever. Amen. But it's not as though the word of God has failed. For not all of you 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. 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, her 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 would 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 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. You will say to me then, why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?

[3 : 1 9] But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, why have you made me like this? Has the potter no right over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and the other for dishonorable use? What if God, what if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory?

Even us whom he has called, not from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles. As indeed he says in Hosea, those who are not my people I will call my people, and here and her who was not beloved I will call beloved.

And in the very place where it is said to them, you are not my people, there they will be called sons of the living God. And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, though a number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay. As Isaiah predicted, if the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have become like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.

Well, may God bless his word to us this evening. Well, if you have God's word with you there, please make your way again to Romans chapter 9. As you do, can I say that anyone who's ever read Romans will know that when you get to Romans chapter 9, it's a bit like going from reasonably shallow water to deep water. And that's what Romans 9 is like. It is fairly deep. But as we make our way through this deep water, I'm going to try and stay on the most shallowest part possible. Now, I recognize that as I proclaim this sermon this evening, as I proclaim God's word this evening, there's going to be a lot of questions that people might go, well, okay, but hang on a minute. And I'm willing to answer them, but now is not necessarily the place, given that not everything that could be said about Romans 9 is able to be said in the preaching of one sermon. So, I grant, as you do, that Romans 9 is deep water, but there are depths that we're not going to get to this evening. We're going to swim from verse 1 to verse 29 along the top, okay? We might dive at some points, but we're going to make it through, and so we will begin. It's fair to say, when we come from Romans 8 into Romans chapter 9, that Paul does change direction slightly. And this may come as a little surprise to us, because he's just finished a chapter which is full of triumph and full of eternal security and full of blessing. And as I've mentioned in the prayer, that the great blessing of the Spirit praying the prayers that we should pray, if only we knew how to pray them, or if only we knew that they needed praying. God takes care of so much that we fail in, and it only re-emphasizes the absolute centrality of God in our life. But here in Romans 9, Paul seems to change direction, but it would be fair to say that everything that Paul says in Romans 9, he's already indicated in verses, in chapters 1 through 8.

So he's not saying anything here that should take us by surprise if we paid attention to the first eight chapters, but I grant that it might just take you by surprise. Everything here in Romans 9 indicates that what God gave to his people in the past was to lead them to Christ, but Paul opens with great anguish over the fact that those people are not actually saved. He says, you know, I'm speaking the truth in Christ, I'm not lying, my conscience bear witness in the Holy Spirit, I have great sorrow.

[7 : 48] Well, I mean, he's laying it on thick. You know, when you say to someone, can I just, can I just be honest with you for a moment, you're not indicating to that person that you're not normally honest with them, hopefully, but you're indicating to them that what you're about to say is all the more urgent and important for you to hear. And Paul seems to open chapter 9 with that kind of, that kind of strength, that please, please listen. You know, I'm not lying. I'm honestly, I'm really not lying. My, even the Holy Spirit will bear witness to my conscience that I'm not lying. What are you not lying about, Paul? I have great sorrow and anguish over the fact that you, some of you, are not saved.

Okay, there's, here's a man, when you understand what he's about to say, you need to keep in mind the heart in which he says that in. And it's a heart full of anguish and full of sorrow over his brothers according to the flesh who are not saved. Now, God does bless his people and he blesses them mightily, but all of those blessings that they had in the past were to lead them to Christ. The trouble was they enjoyed the blessings but rejected Christ. Okay, they loved everything else that God gave them, but when God gave them Jesus, they didn't want him. And Jesus says that in the Gospel of John, or rather John says that about Jesus in the Gospel of John, that Jesus came unto his own and they received him not.

They didn't mind taking everything else that God had to give them, but when God gave them Jesus, they didn't want him. So that there's a real rejection of Jesus Christ with these people whom Paul has great anguish and sorrow over, and that needs remembering. They've enjoyed the privileges, but the privileges didn't lead them to Jesus, or it did lead them to Jesus, but when they got to Jesus, they didn't want Jesus.

They wanted the other stuff more. And it's really the parable of the prodigal son all over again. The story of both sons is that they'd rather have what the father has than the father. Okay, the younger son says, give me my inheritance now, and he does come back, but he goes off enjoying what the father has to give him rather than enjoying the father who gave it. And the older son is no better, because you begin to see his heart at the very end that he too would rather have what the father has than have a relationship with the father. You never gave me a fatted calf, and I've been good all the time. Oh, now I know why you've been good, right? Because you want something. You know, not because you've got a relationship, but it's because you want something. So that's a deep-seated motivation in people of why they perhaps are the way that they are. So these people that Paul has great anguish over are people who enjoy the blessings of God more than God. Okay? They enjoy all the privileges, but they don't want the privileges when they come with Jesus. Jesus comes, and they reject him.

So Paul has to say, look, not all of you who are called Israel are actually Israel. Not all of you who are descendants, physical descendants of Abraham are actually sons of Abraham, which is something that he says in Galatians. Okay? A son of Abraham is someone who lives by faith. Okay? Abraham lived by faith, and it was a credit to him, righteousness. He believed the promises of God, and righteousness was given to him. And that's absolutely crucial, lest you end up thinking, as these people did, all I need to do is be born into the right family, and I've got it good. And Paul gets here and says, no, it was never that way. It was never that way. So not all of Israel are Israel, because not all in Israel have faith in Abraham's God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So the question is, has God failed to save his own people then? God promises to save his people, so has God failed to save his own people? Is God unjust? And you can understand that that's at least a legitimate question, whether or not it's actually a right question. And Paul answers this, if I can illustrate. No, because salvation is a mercy, it's not a wage. Salvation is a mercy, it's not a birthright. Salvation is a privilege that comes from God.

[12 : 30] It's not something that you're owed for practicing religious duties. When a man gets his wage, he gets something that is owed to him. But when a person receives mercy, he gets something that he didn't deserve. Salvation is a merciful act of God, which means that the person receiving it didn't deserve it.

They have been given it by God, but they didn't earn it. It wasn't coming to them anyway. So Paul says, no, when you understand that salvation is a gift of God's mercy, you're overlooking something that's fairly easy to understand. And that is, you're making a distinction, a wrong distinction, between mercy and what is owed. So let me try and illustrate this for you. Imagine a man released from death row.

The governor has just walked into the prison, and there's all these people on death row, and for some reason, we don't know what the reason is, he releases this man from death row. Now the other nine on death row could say, hang on a minute, you know, we're on death row because you didn't show us mercy.

But that's not really the answer, is it? The man who's released from death row has been shown mercy, but he didn't get on death row by not being shown mercy. That's not how he got there in the first place.

The way that he got there in the first place was because of the crime and the sin he committed. He wasn't there because he wasn't shown mercy. Rather, he's not there anymore because he's been shown mercy. But he didn't get there because he hasn't been shown mercy. And Paul understands that people think like that. So in other words, the reason I can't do this is because you didn't give me that. Really? I understand, right? The reason why I'm in prison is because I wasn't shown mercy.

[14 : 30] No, the reason why you're in prison is because you broke the law. The reason why you're out of prison earlier than you should be is because the judge has shown mercy on you. So there's no injustice with God. There's no injustice with mercy. Okay? It is a merciful act of God. But mercy, not receiving mercy, mercy doesn't put a man in prison. His sin does. But mercy can release a man from prison. And that's crucially important to remember, lest you think that God is actually unjust. That God is, you know, treats some people differently than he treats others. The truth is that when you come to salvation, we are the group of people in the whole world that got what we don't deserve.

Okay? When it comes to salvation, the church are the people who got what they don't deserve from God. Mercy. None of us deserved it, but we got it. And God's mercy stretches out into the world in the form of the gospel. That's why Paul, when he gets on to Romans 10, says, preach the gospel. Okay? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word. Get God's mercy out into the world for people to hear. So salvation is not something that's owed. Rather, it is something that is given by God. And the way that God does it is that he does it to fulfill his own plans and purposes. This is why he says in verse 29, when he quotes Isaiah, that if God didn't show mercy, then everyone would become like Sodom and become like Gomorrah. In other words, Paul is emphasizing in verse 29 something that he said all the way through, that if God didn't show any mercy, then we've all had it. If God didn't show any mercy at all, then we've all got nothing to look forward to other than the outer darkness. It's not good news for any of us.

Mercy stops us from getting into the position that we would be in without mercy. Imagine it like this in a slightly different way. Remove God from everything. Okay? Remove God from this world.

Remove God from your life. Remove God just for a moment from everything. And then ask the question, who would be saved? And the answer is startlingly obvious. No one would be saved. And when you put it like that, it's easy to understand that salvation belongs to our God, something which we sing all the time. We sing salvation belongs to our God all the time. And Romans 9 is telling us what salvation belongs to our God actually means. Take God out of the picture and ask the question, who would be saved?

And the answer is clear. No one. Because no one can save themselves. So that's really important, that salvation is the merciful act of God. Now, let's come to Paul's anguish.

[17 : 39] The anguish. The anguish that Paul feels is real. It's genuine. He has a genuine sorrow over his brothers according to the flesh for them not being saved. He even says, if you read carefully, if it were possible for me to substitute my life for yours, in other words, if I could put myself in your place so that you could have my position and I could have yours, I would do it. If I could substitute my life so that you could have my salvation, I would do it in my anguish and my troubled heart. It's so great for you that I would do that in a moment. And I'm sure there's many people in this room here this evening that's looked at a loved one who is lost with that same type of intense feeling for them. If it were only possible for them to be saved and do a swap, I would do it right now.

And then you get to the same conclusion that Paul gets to. You can't do it. You can't do it. There's only one person who can substitute his life for the salvation of that person, and that's Jesus.

Jesus. Jesus is the one who substitutes his life for others that then leads them to salvation. So Paul's anguish is real. Paul's anguish is deep. I would imagine that it hurt him physically.

And anyone who's had anguish over a person who's lost would know that the anguish is an emotion, but it is an emotion that gives you a real pain in your gut, that deep sorrow that you have for someone who's not yet saved. And the reason these people here are not saved, we must be careful in understanding this, is because, not because they haven't been given the privileges, not because they haven't been given the promises. Just look at everything Paul mentions here in verse four onwards.

You know, they had the adoption, they had the glory, they had the covenants, they had the giving of the law, they had worship, they had the promises, they had everything. They had everything. But when God went to give them Jesus, they didn't want him. They wanted everything else, they just didn't want Jesus. I mean, Paul tells you the list of things that they had and the list of things that they enjoyed.

[20 : 07] But Paul's point here is this, that enjoying the privileges of God is no substitute for Jesus. That's Paul's point. Growing up in a Christian family, no substitute for belonging to Jesus.

Coming to Sunday school every single week, brilliant, but no substitute for belonging to Jesus. Enjoying all the benefits and blessings of worship in a community like this, wonderful, but no, it is, it is, it doesn't even come close to belonging to Jesus personally.

And that's the issue. That's the issue. They enjoyed the privileges, but they didn't want Jesus. Okay, the privileges are great, but they are not a substitute for Jesus Christ.

So some people here want to keep the outside of the cup clean. They're not, like Jesus said, they're not too, they're not too bothered about dealing with the inside of the cup.

Now, this is going to be a crucial issue in the church and in society moving forward. Because you're already hearing, even in the church today, where people are claiming certain identities because of how they feel.

[21 : 29] And what they're actually saying is, I am content with only keeping the outside of the cup clean. But it's okay for me to feel these ways as long as I don't practice it.

But Jesus said it's not proper to keep only the outside of the cup clean. He actually said, if a man looks at a woman with lust in his heart, he's already committed adultery.

The inside and the outside must be clean. And that is only something that God can do. And so all of these privileges are external.

And it's easy to keep the outside of the cup clean in those external privileges. I come to church every week. You see me praying. I even come with a Bible that has gold leaf.

Man, you must be godly. Right? It's even leather bound. Okay? All of these images portray a form of godliness, but not the heart of godliness.

[22 : 35] Now, don't get me wrong. There's nothing wrong with leather bound Bibles with gold leaf. I only wish I could have one. The issue is fairly simple. That do not be content with only the outside of the cup being clean.

Salvation is salvation to its core. Christianity gets down into the very heart of men, women, boys, and girls. So the issue here is this.

That no one is condemned who wants to be saved. Let me say that again. Write it down if you have to. No one is condemned who wants to be saved.

And those who are condemned don't want to be saved. Okay? No one is condemned who wants to be saved. You will not find that in the world. And no one who wants to be saved will be condemned.

Remember that as you read Romans 9. So now we come on to the promise and the mercy. Now this is where God tends to change things up a little.

[23 : 36] God makes a promise to Abraham. And one of the promises that he makes to Abraham includes his wife. And that his wife Sarah would have a son. Well, she didn't ask for a son. And the fact that she was told that she was going to have a son took her by surprise.

It made her laugh. And she called her son Isaac, which means laughter. I mean, talk about suddenly, you know, being surprised by being expecting again.

Well, this truly was a big surprise for Sarah. That's not a normal way of doing things. God could have chose a younger man and a younger woman to be able to, you know, produce a child.

But he didn't. He chose people in ripe old ages. But then with Rebecca, she's told, strangely, that the older would serve the younger.

Well, that doesn't happen. I mean, that's an odd way of doing things. Because in Scripture, the older is the head. Everything, that's the way that it happens. But here, Rebecca's told that the older would serve the younger.

[24 : 40] Why? Well, because that's the way God was going to do things. You know, God was going to do lots of things. But that was the way God was going to do his fulfilling. So this raises the question for us.

Why does God do the things the way that he does them? And how many of us have asked that question? If I were you, God, this is how I would do it. I would do things differently, Lord.

Because this is how I see it from my point of view. Why can't you see it that way? And every time people ask those questions, they go up against God, who does it the way that he does.

Now, Paul does something here, or rather doesn't do something here. And that is, he doesn't explain. He doesn't explain why he does the things that he does. He just says, to put it simply, because God is God.

So we get to that point where we want to ask the difficult questions of God. And the only answer that comes back to us, rightly or wrongly, is because God is God.

[25 : 44] I don't know how you feel about that. But I don't necessarily feel all that encouraged at times. Because that seems like a dead end. But God, but, and I can't, I've still got a lot of questions.

I can keep going here, and you've cut me off with a simple statement, I am God. But this is what Paul does say. That all the decisions that God makes, all the decisions that God makes, have nothing to do with the people in question.

I want you to remember that also. When Paul, when Paul explains that God makes the decisions that he does, he's explaining them from the point of view that God does not take the people into consideration.

Notice in verse 11, he says this. Though they were not yet born, speaking of Rebekah's sons, Jacob and Esau, 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. So here we have, very, very clear, not necessarily comfortable, but very, very clear, God explaining that he is making the decision that he does, and it has nothing to do with the people in question.

[27 : 08] It's not because Jacob is better than Esau, or Esau's better than Jacob. It's not because one's stronger or one's weaker, or one's taller or one's shorter. It's got nothing to do with that. They've done nothing.

God made his decision even before they were in the world. And that's the way that it is, in order that his promises might continue.

The issue here is that when it comes to God and it comes to mercy, we naturally think that we are deserving. And the answer is, or rather the reality is, we're not that deserving of it.

God is merciful, and we ought to look to God for his mercy, but the thing that we ought to be looking for is actually God's mercy. We should not be looking or expecting something that we're owed.

We don't actually want what we're owed. We want God's mercy. And so God does the ways, God does what he does in light of his own mercy.

[28 : 14] But then you need to ask yourself, well, what is God's mercy? And it's this. Remember, out of everything that you hear here, God's mercy, God's character, is to send his only son, to die on the cross, to be a substitute, to be a sacrifice.

And he does that to let us know that he is a gracious and merciful God. Again, we would like Paul to explain, well, could you tell me just a little bit more, Paul, of why God does it this way and Paul doesn't?

I would love for Paul to explain more here, but he doesn't explain more. God can do as he pleases because he is God, but the God who does as he pleases sends his own son.

The God that we believe in who can do as he pleases gives us his son, sends his son to the cross as a sacrifice, as a substitute. So I don't mind God doing as he pleases because look at what he does when he pleases himself.

He sends his son for his own glory, and that glory means that we are saved out of it. Men, women, boys and girls, and none of us requested Jesus to come.

[29 : 28] See, we tend to forget that bit, right? God sent his son, and you imagine a world that's looking up to God saying, we've been waiting a long time. But that's clearly not the case.

God sends his son into a world where no one requested him to come. In fact, when he did come, they didn't want him. So God's mercy is deep and wide, and we sing this also many times.

So the conclusion Paul comes to, in verses 25 through to 29, we sing in a song that salvation belongs to our God.

Salvation belongs to our God. What these few verses teach us, in verses 25 through to 29, especially 29, you could answer, is that if God was not merciful, then his judgment would have wiped every single one of us away.

that if God didn't send his son, then there's no hope for anyone. That if God didn't send his son, then there is no mercy, there is no salvation, there is nothing, apart from the outer darkness.

[30 : 43] So here's a few considerations as we close. It's important to recognize that in the church, just like in Israel, that not all the people here, in the church today, are actually God's people.

There are many people who enjoy the privileges of being in church, but don't necessarily have that relationship with God that needs to be explained, as it is explained in scripture.

Now this doesn't create doubt in those who truly believe and belong to Jesus, because they know they truly believe and belong, so it doesn't create doubt. So why does it continue to happen?

Why does the church, Jesus told a parable, the wheat and the tares growing together, and I'm confused even to why that happens. Well it happens because people enjoy religion. People enjoy privileges.

People love having what God has without God. In fact, the world is full of them. You think of a person in the world today who does not enjoy something that God created without God.

[31 : 53] Everyone. The world is full of people who enjoy the privileges of God without God. And so it's not too difficult to imagine how these people make their way into the very visible church.

And so this passage comes with a clear conscience call for us all. Not for us who truly belong and believe. We know we belong and believe.

But to ask ourselves honestly, who do we love more? The privileges or Christ? Which is our trust in? The privileges or Christ?

Are we trusting in our prayers more than Jesus? Are we trusting in the fact that we come to church more than Jesus? In other words, what is the center of our very hope and position before God?

Is it Jesus? Paul makes it very clear that God's mercy is Jesus. Okay? And he made that clear in the first eight chapters of Romans.

[32 : 54] Some people love a religious identity. I go to church. I say my prayers. I even give occasionally. But Christianity gets to the very heart.

The very heart. And that's where mercy rests. And it rests in the form of Jesus Christ. Never forget that we didn't ask for God's mercy.

And we didn't ask for it because we weren't looking for it. God gave it to us. So here's the exhortation. It seems that anguish and deep sorrow goes hand in hand with knowing the gospel properly.

It seems that a Christian can suffer his whole life or her whole life with great sorrow and great anguish over unbelievers simply because they understand that salvation belongs to our God.

And they also understand that men and women, boys and girls, can love the religious privileges without ever loving God himself. But as we live with that anguish, and it's not easy, and as we live with that deep sorrow, and that's not easy, even for a moment, remember that no one is condemned who wants to be saved.

[34 : 21] Okay? No one is condemned who wants to be saved. And no one who wants to be saved is condemned. Every privilege is to lead a person to Jesus.

But do we accept? The way to read Romans 9, in fact, the way to read the rest of Romans or the whole of Romans, is to understand Paul's heart here.

Even when Paul defends the word of God, even when Paul defends the justice of God, not that it needs defending, but he makes his point. Remember, he makes his point with deep anguish and deep sorrow in his heart for his brothers and sisters, according to the flesh, who are not saved.

Those who have been in the presence of all the privileges and yet rejected Jesus when he came. Paul's message in Romans 9 is this.

Salvation belongs to our God. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[35 : 28] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.