

The Word of God Will Not Fail

Romans 9:6-13

Let me begin this morning with the word of God from Isaiah 55. If you have not read this chapter recently, I encourage you to open your Bible this week and drink-in the wonderful promises and invitation of Isaiah 55. But this morning let the word of the Lord fill your minds and hearts as I read verses 6-11 for you.

6 Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says 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.

10 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater,

11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

God's word shall not fail. His promises are tied to His character, His wisdom, His power, and His purposes. God is faithful to do what He promises.

As we have studied in Romans we have seen that through Paul, God has given the Roman believers and us the clearest and most magnificent treatment on assurance of salvation found anywhere in Scripture. Chapter 8 reverberates with the promises of what God in Christ has done and will do for those who are in Christ. No one can bring a charge against God's elect. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

In chapter 8 Paul established that: God has a purpose for believers; that nothing can prevent that purpose from being fulfilled; and that no one can separate God's people from His love.

But in chapter 9, Paul raises the objection I'm sure he has heard many times as he preached the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. As he said in chapter 1, he preached first to the Jew and then to the Greek. Jesus said He was sent for the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24).

So the question comes: What about the Israelites? Weren't they God's chosen people? God loved them and had a purpose for them too. Yet, as John writes in his gospel about Jesus Christ. **"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him,"** (John 1:11).

So many of the Jews have rejected Jesus Christ and the salvation that comes through faith in Him. As we saw last time in verses 1-5, Paul expresses his deep sorrow over the lostness of his kinsmen, the Jewish people. He wrote in verse 3, **"For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh."**

If the Jews of whom are, as verses 4-5 say, **"the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5 of whom are the**

fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God”—if they are lost and appear to have become separated from the love of God, haven't God's promises and eternal purposes failed? If so, then what basis do you and I have for believing that God's promises to us will be fulfilled? Our Christian hope and assurance is at stake! Has God been faithful to his promises? If not, what are we hoping in?

Predicament: It appears like God's promises to Israel have failed. Will His promises to us also fail?

Every week as we study chapters 9-11 we must keep in mind that this is the predicament, this is the crisis Paul is dealing with. Israel is God's chosen people and most of them are perishing, cut off from the Savior, Jesus Christ. And the reason it is a crisis for you, and not just for Jews, is that, if God's promises to Israel do not hold true, then what assurance do we have that God's promises to you will hold true?

Keep that in mind as we read the text today, **Romans 9:6-13**,

6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,

7 nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." (Genesis 21:12)

8 That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son." (Genesis 18:10,14)

10 And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac

11 (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),

12 it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." (Genesis 25:23)

13 As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." (Malachi 1:3)

Prayer:

Proclamation: God's word has not failed. (Rom. 9:6)

Verse 6 states the main point of the whole chapter. **"But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect."** God's word has not failed. That is Paul's proclamation against the predicament of Israel's unbelief. Yes, it is true that many in the covenant people are accursed and cut off from Christ, and yes it is true that God chose Israel and made a covenant with her and gave her promises, but, no, it is not true that the word of God has failed. That is Paul's declaration.

Almost everything else throughout the next three chapters supports this statement, God's word has not failed. Therefore God is faithful, God is able to accomplish His purposes. So keep in mind as we move through this chapter that some of the clearest statements in the Bible about election are made here to prove that God is faithful to keep His promises.

Paul then an answer for this predicament that will prove that God's word has not failed. What then, what is Paul's position, his argument in support of God's faithfulness? How

can he say that the word of God has not failed even though many Israelites are accursed and cut off from Christ? He states his position three times in verses 6-9 and gives two Old Testament quotations to support it.

Position: Not all Israel is true Israel (Rom. 9:6-9)

1. Ethnic Israel and True Israel (Rom. 9:6b)

First, in verse 6b he says, "**For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.**" In other words, Paul's argument is that the promises of God always hold true for the true Israel, the spiritual Israel, but not all ethnic Israel is true Israel. That's his first statement of the argument: There is a difference between ethnic Israel and the true Israel of God. The implication is: there is a true Israel; God's saving promises are made to them; and these promises have never failed.

2. All Descendants of Abraham and the Children of Abraham (Rom. 9:7a)

Second, in verse 7a he says it a little differently, but makes the same point: "**nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham.**" In other words, he is distinguishing here between two kinds of "children" – there are all of Abraham's descendants, the seed of Abraham, and there is a narrower group in that number whom he calls here "the children," or we could say, "the true children." The implication is that the promises of God hold true for the true children of Abraham but not for all the physical descendants of Abraham. So in verse 6 he says that not all Israel is Israel, and in verse 7 he says that not all the descendants of Abraham are children. There is a true Israel and there are true children. The word of God has not failed, because it was meant for the true Israel, the true children, and it has never failed any of them.

3. The Children of the Flesh and the Children of God (Rom. 9:8)

Third, in verse 8 Paul states the argument a third time in more general terms without naming Israel or Abraham so that we see the principle involved. "**That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.**" This is why the word of God has not failed – why the promises of God have not failed – even though many of Israelites according to the flesh are accursed and cut off from Christ. It's because the promises are for the children of God – not children of the flesh.

When Paul distinguishes "children of the flesh" and "children of God" he means that not all physical Israelites are "children of God." When he then says that these "children of God" are "children of promise," he means that they have their spiritual position not because of their physical connections, but because of God's promise. The promise produced the position.

Proof: Two Old Testament examples. (Rom. 9:7-13)

Paul gives us Biblical support for this. He is proving that the word of God has not failed even though so many Israelites are accursed and cut off from Christ. The position is that they were not true Israelites. They were not true children of Abraham. They were children of the flesh but not children of promise, children of God.

Now where does Paul see this idea? Where does he find the idea that the promise of God is not simply for every Israelite, but for those who are children of promise? And what does that mean – children of promise?

The Case of Isaac

Paul gives two illustrations in verses 6-13. The first is in verse 7. After Paul says, "**nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham**," he quotes Genesis 21:12, "**but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.'**" The context here in the Old Testament is where God is saying to Abraham, even though you have an older son, Ishmael, he will not be the heir of the promise. What Paul sees in this example is that being a physical child of Abraham, and even being the oldest, did not make Ishmael an heir of the promise to the covenant people.

Then in verse 9 Paul adds another insight from Genesis 18:10. After saying in verse 8 that "**but the children of the promise are counted as the seed**," then he quotes Genesis 18:10, "**For this is the word of promise: 'At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.'**" The context here is important. In Genesis 12 God had promised Abram that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3). In Genesis 15 God promised Abram that his descendants would be like the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5). As we saw in Romans 4, Abraham exercised saving faith at these promises, "**And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness**," (Genesis 15:6).

But Abraham had no offspring and his wife Sarah was barren. What was the solution? Abraham's answer should have been, "I'll trust God for a child of promise. I'll trust God that the divine promise itself is powerful enough to bring itself to pass." But instead Abraham did what he could do in his own strength: he used Hagar, a maid of Sarah, as a concubine and produced a child named Ishmael. Abraham helped God out of his predicament. And produced what Paul called a "**child of the flesh**." He was "**born according to the flesh**" (Galatians 4:29). That is, his position was owing to no more than what man could do.

Abraham wanted Ishmael to be the heir God had promised. In Genesis 17:18 Abraham said to God, "**Oh, that Ishmael might live before you!**" But God said, "**No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.**" That's the context of Paul's quote in Romans 9:9. God promises: "**At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.**" You see the purpose of God's promise here. I make the promise, God says. And I bring it to pass. My promises are not predictions of what may come about with your help. My promises are declarations of what I intend to bring about by my own purpose. "**I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.**" Barren Sarah and old Abraham will have not a child of the flesh, but a child of promise.

So what is a child of promise (child of God)? A child of promise is an heir of God's saving grace, not because of ethnic origin or physical birth. But because of God's word of promise. The birth of Isaac is a picture of how every child of God spiritually comes into being. It was God's choice and God's work. It was not Abraham's choice and it was not Isaac's work. It was God's.

The promise and purpose of God was never that every descendant of Abraham would be guaranteed salvation. The promise was: God will see to it that the true Israel is brought into being and saved. And we have seen, and will see again; this true Israel includes Jews and Gentiles.

The Case of Jacob and Esau

But someone might object. That's just not a good enough example. Ishmael's mother, Hagar, was an Egyptian and not Abraham's wife but a concubine. So Paul's next example shows the electing grace of God with Jacob instead of Esau. Verse 10, "**And**

not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac."

So here we're speaking of the same father, Isaac; the same mother, Rebekah, and even the same conception because they were twins, born on the same day. In case we might think that God chose Jacob over Esau on the basis of His knowledge of who they would become, Paul emphasizes in verse 11, **"(for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls)."**

What's that saying? It's saying God chose between Jacob and Esau before they were ever born. God chose them before they ever did any good or any evil. These boys had not been born so there were no behavioral issues to consider. They had not done good or bad (the word means "foul" or "worthless"), so there was no foreseen merit that moved God to make a choice for Jacob and not Esau. Everything, instead, was grounded in God electing purpose.

Every person chosen to salvation whether in Israel or in the church is chosen by God before the person is born. The Bible says your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life from the foundation of the world. And you will in life confirm that choice by believing. That's a mystery.

This teaching of Romans 9 does not contradict the truth that Jacob and Esau and you and I make choices in life and will be held responsible for those choices. If Jacob is saved he will be saved by faith. And if Esau is finally condemned, he will be condemned for his evil deeds and unbelief. Our final judgment will accord with the way we have responded to the gospel in this life.

The will to believe is saving, and the will not to believe is damning. We are held responsible for both. But underneath both is God's free and unconditional election of who will be saved and who will not. The elect believe. The non-elect do not believe. We are not sovereign, self-determining, autonomous beings. Only God is. How God renders certain the belief and unbelief of men without undermining our accountability I do not fully understand.

The measure of this choice of Jacob is found in those searing words, "Just as it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'." Here Paul quotes from Malachi's argument regarding the faithful love of God for Israel. They had questioned His love during the post-exilic days when Israel cared more for consumerism and nationalism than loving and obeying the Lord God. So he explained the distinction that God made between Jacob and Esau by using the language of love and hatred.

The magnanimous nature of God's electing love is couched in those most severe terms so that we understand that salvation is all of grace. Jacob was no prize yet God chose him out of His own sovereign, free, unconditional grace.

How shall we apply this to ourselves?

The way God brings into being the true Israel is, finally by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, as the true Seed of Abraham, the true Son of David, and, in a profound sense, the true Israel himself. Jesus fulfills all that Israel was destined for. And now every person, Jew or Gentile, who trusts in Christ, is united to him and becomes part of this true Israel in Christ.

The question facing you this morning is: Do you trust in Christ Jesus as your Savior and Lord? Are you united to him? Has he made you a child of promise, a child of God? If so rejoice in the Lord and serve Him with your whole life. If not, trust Him now.

Respond now to the invitation of God through Isaiah:

1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.

6 Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.

**7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon.**