

96-11-03a

We'll continue our worship this morning in Psalm 33 our scripture reading. The first 50 psalms as you know are attributed to David and 33 falling within that range we believe this to be a psalm of David and it's a psalm of joy Rejoice in the Lord. Oh you righteous for praise from the upright is beautiful Praise the Lord with the harp make melody to him with an instrument of ten strings Sing to him a new song play skillfully with a shout of joy For the word of the Lord is right and all his work is done in truth He loves righteousness and justice the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord By the word of the Lord the heavens were made and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth He gathered the waters of the sea together as a heap.

He lays up the deep in storehouses Let all the earth fear the Lord Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him for he spoke and it was done He commanded and it stood fast The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect the counsel of the Lord stands forever the plans of his heart to all generations Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord the people he has chosen as his own inheritance The Lord looks from heaven. He sees all the sons of men from the place of his dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashions their hearts individually.

He considers all their works no king is saved by the multitude of an army a mighty man is not delivered by great strength a Horse is a vain hope for safety neither shall it deliver any by its great strength Behold the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him on those who hope in his mercy To deliver their soul from death and to keep them alive in famine our soul waits for the Lord He is our help and our shield for our heart shall rejoice in him because we have trusted in his holy name Let your mercy O Lord be upon us just as we hope in you May God add his blessing to the reading and the hearing of his word this morning one of the obvious principles in this psalm as throughout the Word of God is That we make choices about God and his existence and his word his plan those who Seek that those who pay attention to God and his purposes are blessed those who ignore God are ignored by God Both in this life and in the age to come and we're going to see this morning as we can continue our study in Romans chapter 9 and we go forward from what we covered in our last session on Friday night This is God's purpose in choosing God chooses certain individuals in the human race for Blessing God chooses certain individuals in the human race and and saves us from the destruction of the lake of fire Why does he choose some and not others? This is the great question that has faced the human race from Adam forward and we've developed great theological systems and in some of these ideas we just decide that we don't know why God chose and it's the Inscrutability of his own counsel and the the unsearchability of God's mind who can who has known the mind of the Lord he in reformed theology, for example, he apparently For some reason known only to himself chose some of us out for salvation and failed to choose others Those that he failed to choose Have no hope no chance. No opportunity. They are created and then they are Consigned to the lake of fire forever the Problem with that view and others like it is that it does not give us a picture of God That we

can follow we are called to be like God we are called to be imitators of God imitators of Christ who is the fullness of the deity and if we In practical terms if we try to carry this out We might be an employer with employees and we will just arbitrarily select some employees for promotion and we will arbitrarily fire others for no Reason other than the inscrutable counsel of our own will This does not reflect righteousness.

It doesn't reflect justice. It doesn't reflect any reasonable or logical system of thinking it is it it pictures God as being capricious or arbitrary or Inscrutable the whole purpose of the Word of God is to reveal God not to obscure him it is to make his character and his purpose clear to us not to To make it cloudy and unknowable because we are made in the image of God and we are to Make progress in emulating God and in acting like him and God does things for a reason and he has revealed those reasons in the pages of Scripture our Subject this morning as we continue in Romans 9 is going to address the purpose of God in election turn with me to Romans chapter 9 and Keep this psalm 33 in mind by the way, because you will notice that In verse 11 of psalm 33 the counsel of the Lord stands forever the plans of his heart Stand to all generations Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord The people that he has chosen as his own inheritance. Why did God choose Israel in the Old Testament to be his people? Why didn't he choose the Hittites? Why did he not choose the Assyrians or the Egyptians? Well, the psalm answers that in verses 13 and following the Lord looks from heaven.

He sees all the sons of men Up there in the place of his dwelling. He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth He made each of the hearts. He knows these hearts inside out.

He created them and he considers all their works and Then in verses 16 and 17 he talks about the fact that there is no deliverance for those who rely on their own strength or some human idea of what Strength is we think that talent or fame or good opportunities or good connections or pleasing Personalities or something like that will determine Our fate But scripture says no king is saved by the strength and the size of his army a Mighty man is not delivered by his great strength This is what we traditionally rely on but that's not what God is looking at God doesn't look for the strong and save them people who trust in a horse a horse was a symbol of strength in The ancient world but look at verse 18 the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him This is the basis for God's blessing. This is the basis for God's choice God foresees those who are going to respond to him and in eternity past before the world was created God designated those who would respond to him and his word for blessing he chose out those in the Old Testament to be the seed of Abraham and to receive the Fulfillment of all the promises that were made to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to the nation of Israel In eternity past before the world was created. God said I'm going to create a world.

I'm going to make my person and my plan clear and whoever responds to that in a positive manner whoever seeks me and Responds to me. I'm going to bless and That's God's purpose God is demonstrating something not only in the human race But also to the what we call the the angels the heavenly creation There is another order of beings besides humans We loosely and

relatively inaccurately call these beings angels. Angels are only a subset of the heavenly creation. They're referred to in the Bible as the sons of God. They are referred to as the heavenly hosts.

They are referred to as Elohim as gods themselves in the sense of being Heavenly beings. They are called principalities and powers and rulers in high places. This is a society of creatures who exist in. However, you want to look at it dimensions that are beyond our access. They live in the realms where God dwells. They see God. God sees them. We of course all of that is invisible to us.

We're restricted to three dimensions and time. They are outside of those three dimensions, although they can operate in this universe as well. But the Bible is replete with references to these Beings. They are called stars. The stars sang together when God created the universe and created the heavens. This is referenced in Job and the Psalms. But God is demonstrating something to all of his sentient creation, all of the creatures, all of the thinking beings that God has created, both the heavenly hosts and human beings. God wants to communicate his character. He's and he's demonstrating something about his way in the broad scheme of the universe. God is making a point because historically in the eternal past, before the world was created, God had created the heavenly beings, and a number of those beings led by Satan or Lucifer chose against God. We have the record of this episode in Isaiah 14 and in Ezekiel 28 talking about the fall of Satan. Satan said, "I will be like the Most High."

I am I. There's no reason why we should all be following God's plan. Why can't I set policy? Why can't I? Determine the course of events. Why is it that we are? Why is it wrong and why is it bad to have a system apart from God and apart from his principles and something that is independent of him to be independent of God isn't necessarily to be wrong.

This is Satan's fundamental argument. Why can't we go off and do our own thing? Why must we be? Connected with and under the authority of God. Why can't God let us be independent and do our own thing? And that's one of the fundamental purposes of human history is to show what happens when creatures operate independently of God because God is Light and God is life. Anything that is independent of God will degenerate. It will tend toward chaos. It will tend toward destruction. It will destroy itself ultimately. We as creatures have to have a connection to God or we fail. We degenerate. We it's like the second law of thermodynamics in a system left to itself. Everything will trend toward a greater state of disorganization. To put it in common terms, everything put together falls apart without the life-giving connection to God that we all require. And God demonstrates this when Satan made his decision to be separate from God and he said, "Why can't we operate independently?" God said, "This is Rebellion, it's sinful, and Satan and his followers were condemned to the lake of fire, but the objection came up."

Well, why are we condemned? Just because we want to be different because we want to depart from the divine norm and standard. Why is it inherently wrong? and why must we be destroyed and consigned to the lake of fire simply because we disagree and want to do something different?

from God and To make this point clear to the heavenly creation God Formed the earthly creation and he it's like a laboratory experiment. He said, okay Look, I'm going to create a a lower form of life here in the same way that in a scientific lab We use rats and we put them in a maze and I don't mean to demean us by saying we're like lab rats But there's a sense in which human history is a demonstration to the heavenly hosts of The effects of choice when we choose for God or when we choose against God what happens? Satan's goal is to try to demonstrate that life apart from God can be Good that it can be Separate but equal if you will and of course we are going to As we see the course of human history We find out that any system no matter how high its ideals and how lofty its goals falls apart when it is godless You can see this throughout human history and God Demonstrates this in Scripture. So what's the point? The point here is God's purpose in blessing people and groups in human history is designed to show the benefits of choosing for God and the necessity for Destroying that which is against God when left to itself it degenerates it becomes destructive Blood runs after blood as the scripture says in the Old Testament Because there is no life-giving power in it and when that light and that life are absent It's going to be destructive.

It's going to be inherently evil and Fall apart people are constantly asking the question if there is a God, how could he allow the Holocaust? How could he allow starving children in Ethiopia? This is a demonstration a Necessary demonstration of what life is like apart from God. Why is that famine in Ethiopia? Ethiopia is one of the most godless nations on the planet and has been for generations What is the religion in these? Afflicted countries you look at Cambodia you look at the bloodshed in Russia You look at the bloodshed in northern Europe during World War two. What was the nature of things in those countries? It was godless it was Apart from God apart from the life of God apart from paying attention to God's truth and Those societies degenerate you look at the ancient world and you look at the Canaanites Why did God tell the Israelites go in and kill them all kill the women kill the babies? Because they had become so degenerate they were actually taking their newborn infants and sacrificing them They were putting them alive into fire to worship their gods That's what happens when creatures try to function independent of God And that's the demonstration so the point here is God has a purpose in human history He has a purpose in allowing free choice And he's demonstrating that when we choose apart from God we tend toward destruction and we must be removed We must perish from the earth.

We must be separated off and segregated. We must be Destroyed those who choose for God Connect to the life of God and the character of God and receive blessing and reward from God because they do so That's the demonstration. That's what the what human history is all about We look at this human life and we think well, I'm here.

I'm in the material world I've got to have some money to pay my bills. I need to get ahead. I need a job I need to I need to find circumstances that will please me and make me happy and so forth But ultimately we all end up in the grave read the book of Ecclesiastes Whether you're righteous or whether you're evil, we all are we fade like a leaf we perish off of the earth so what's

the point do we just as Shakespeare said we front and strut our Fret and strut our hour upon the stage and then we you know, the curtain falls and it's all over with And it's vanity it's emptiness.

What's the point? well, there is a point and there's an eternal point and all of us are eternal creatures and Whether we like it or not God is in charge and God is making this demonstration and it's up to us to get on the right side of that equation on the blessing and the life and the Positive future side of what God is doing in history the bottom line is God has a purpose in choosing some for salvation and some for destruction and His point is to demonstrate that those who choose God God will honor those who deny and ignore God are Under a curse God has to eliminate God has to destroy them before they like a cancer spread and destroy The world and the creation itself. It's necessary for God to segregate Satan and his followers in the lake of fire It's necessary for God in human history to purge Those who depart from God because they it's like a cancer It's like a disease and left untreated. It will spread and destroy Everything God has created This is what Paul is referencing in Romans chapter 9 when he says about Jacob and Esau that it is the purpose of God according to election that must stand It's the purpose of God with reference to choosing God has a purpose It's not the capricious unknowable inscrutable sovereign Random choice of God that that Jacob is The one who inherits and Esau is the one who does not the purpose of God in choosing is just is to verify What he has said throughout Scripture What does God say in first Samuel talking about Eli and the sons of Eli and I believe it's in first Samuel chapter 4 He says I will honor those who honor me And people say well you're putting God in a subservient position you're making God Respond to the choices of man and God is being pulled on a string by what man decides Not at all God is the one that set this up God is the one that created us and gave us free will and God is making a Point in the same way that we train our children and we say if you're obedient You'll have privileges if you disobey you're going to have restrictions if you obey You're going to have a great Environment you're going to receive all of the blessings that come from being a good and obedient child if you disobey if you're rebellious You're going to find that Times are harsh and you don't get to do the things you want to do and you don't have the things you want to have It isn't that the child is now controlling the parent The parent is training the child and teaching the child the way life works You have to learn to respond to authority.

You have to recognize your responsibilities and fulfill them It is a benefit to the child that the parent Blesses if you will the good choices of the child and curses or disciplines the bad choices of the child It's necessary to teach life That's what God is doing with us And of course God being God and being all-knowing can foresee these things and make provision for them in eternity past He doesn't have to wait on us To choose and before we are born and before we do anything right or wrong God knows what we're going to do. His knowledge does not determine what we're going to do But he knows because he's God he sees the end from the beginning So in Romans chapter 9 verse 11 Paul says about Jacob and Esau the children had not yet been born They had not done anything good or evil So that the purpose of God according to choosing might stand not of works But of him who calls the emphasis here isn't on the merit of Jacob and the demerit of Esau

The the Emphasis here is on God the point We're supposed to draw out of this is not boy Jacob must have really been a good guy and Esau must have really been a rat He says no, it's not it's not about the works that these guys did it the the emphasis is on God Look at God. What is God's purpose? Why is God doing this the normal course of events the pattern that God himself established? Is it the oldest son inheritance? Why did God turn that on its head? Why did the older son wind up serving the younger? Why did the younger son get the inheritance? Well, that's God's purpose in choosing God's purpose in choosing some for blessing and others for discipline Some for life and some for destruction is to emphasize the point that we are accountable for what we decide about God Creatures are accountable to the Creator.

That's God's purpose in choosing. That's the point Why does he bless some and curse others to demonstrate that we're responsible to choose God and when we don't we're going to get disciplined We're going to be destroyed That's the purpose of God. That's what we want to look at this morning.

Now. We saw Friday night that Even after our salvation even after we acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God that he is the Payment for our sins. He is the only way to have eternal life There's no work of righteousness that we can do.

We can't be moral. We can't have good intentions we can't be better than the average and Live with God in the eternal future because that's not God's purpose in choosing God doesn't say I want to find the moral ones or I want to find the slightly better ones and and save them and he's Wicked self-centered evil people. I'm just going to destroy them.

That's not God's purpose in choosing God is not trying to bless the relatively moral or the relatively good God says I will honor those who honor me personally Here is my son Jesus Christ What do you think of him? If you acknowledge that you're hopeless helpless and useless and that you have to have a connection with God for life That comes in the person of Jesus Christ and we make a decision about Jesus Christ It doesn't matter what we do in this context. It only to Matt matters what we think about Jesus Christ He is the way the truth and the life and no one comes to the father except through him God is going to to bless With salvation from the lake of fire those who acknowledge Jesus Christ and recognize and it takes the edge off of our pride We have to acknowledge that there's nothing we can do to save ourselves that we don't have enough merit to exist independently of God We're sinful we tend toward Degeneration and destruction we don't have any life in and of ourselves that can Sustain itself apart from God. We require a dependent relationship on God and it comes through Christ that's the first hurdle as Believers in Jesus Christ God is going to continue to choose some for blessing and some for discipline And why does he do that because the same principle applies even after salvation as believers? God is making a point that we have to cultivate our Relationship with God we have to pursue our connection with God To continue to receive the favor and blessing of God If we get our ticket to heaven and then say well, that's all I'm interested in.

I just wanted to avoid the hot place We are going to find in this life and in the next that we don't get anywhere Because the pattern is the same Salvation is just one Demonstration of this principle and so here in Romans 9 Paul is talking to believers about the life of believers after salvation Jacob and Esau are both believers in God but one of them is blessed and the other is not one receives an inheritance and The favor of God and the other does not God says Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated now? That's a strong statement to make about a believer to say Esau I have hated and it doesn't mean that God has this angry emotional hatred and is going to drop him Alive into the lake of fire love and hate as we have seen our covenant terms used in the Treaty language of the ancient Near East love means blessing hate means discipline lack of blessing We know that when it comes to God's attitude toward the world God loves the entire world He doesn't love some and hate others he loves everyone in the sense of wanting them to be saved, but he has a purpose in choosing and so God told the mother of Jacob and Esau he told Sarah or Rebecca rather the older shall serve the younger as it is written Jacob have I loved Esau have I hated So then in verse 14, what shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Is it wrong of God to pick one over another? If there is no rhyme or reason to it, we could legitimately ask that question That doesn't seem right even in normal human parlance to arbitrarily Elevate one and denigrate another doesn't seem fair And so the question comes up. Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not and we saw in verses 15 through 18 That there is a reason for God's mercy on some and There is a reason for God's wrath on others and he uses the example of Moses and a Pharaoh Moses is at one end of the spectrum God says I will have mercy on you Moses because I've been able to have mercy on you in the past I am able to keep on choosing you for blessing because you keep on choosing me Moses was The one of the greatest men of faith in the Old Testament Even when he failed even when he killed someone even when he failed to circumcise his children Even when he made a lot of mistakes, he kept coming back to God. He kept Choosing God and pursuing God and being faithful to God He stayed up in the mountain 40 days and 40 nights to see the glory of God and God said Moses I've been able to have mercy on you consistently because you keep choosing me.

I'm going to keep on having mercy on you I'm going to be able to give you rewards and I'm going to be able to let you view my glory in a way that that virtually no one else in human history has or will have and So he puts Moses up on the mountain in the cleft of the rock and he covers Moses with his hand and he lets his glory Pass before him and he says Moses. I will have mercy on You because I have had mercy on you I've been able to my purpose in choosing is fulfilled in you because you keep choosing me And then he contrasts that with Pharaoh and he says I've raised Pharaoh up Pharaoh Doesn't care anything about God Pharaoh is the leader of the land of Egypt Egypt represents bondage It represents oppression of the people of God It represents the antithesis of everything that God wants to do God raises Pharaoh up to show his power and that his name may be declared in all the earth God's making a point when he chooses Moses for mercy and he chooses Pharaoh for destruction What is that point you better wake up and pay attention to God you'd better choose God so that he can continue to choose you You'd better

honor God so that he can honor honor us. That's the point and So in verse 18, it makes sense.

He has mercy on the ones that he wills to have mercy on and The ones that he wishes to he hardens We did a study on hardening a week or two ago and we've seen that that hardening is something that we do to ourselves Israel continually hardened their hearts against God. They failed to honor God. They chose against God.

They disregarded God. They They took their relationship with God for granted Israel represents believers and yet Throughout the prophets in the Old Testament. God says you are a stiff-necked and disobedient people You disregard me you stray you wander away from the right way.

I rescued you from Egypt It's a picture of salvation, but you you don't care. You don't honor me. You don't Pursue the things that I have called you to and for that reason I am going to Discipline you I'm going to punish you you're going to go back into exile.

You're going to go into Bondage again and isn't it interesting that Israel the people who were delivered out of the bondage of Egypt under the blood of the Passover Lamb, which is a picture of being delivered from sin and the bondage of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ That nation a Picture of believers winds up back in bondage in Assyria. They wind up back in bondage in Babylon And they're the people of God, but their status is just like It was in Egypt. They live the life of unbelievers.

They get no blessing no Advantage to being the people of God. They're just like they were in Egypt That can happen to us as believers and we can have no sense of the presence of God or the blessing of God Our life does continually trend toward Bad things and why is that it's because of choices we make we put ourself in the place of blessing by choosing God and we put ourself in the in the place of Discipline and cursing and no blessing from God when we fail to honor God and fail to put him first He has mercy on whom he wills and whom he wills he hardens there is a basis for that choice that God makes he has a purpose in choosing and His purpose is to demonstrate I will honor those who honor me and those who Despise me. I will lightly esteem as it says in first Samuel.

I will have no regard I will give them no blessing. In fact, God is going to to discipline them This is so clear in the Old Testament. Look back at Deuteronomy chapter 7 God has a purpose in choosing his purpose according to election as it says in Romans 9 Deuteronomy chapter 7 This is Moses Exhorting the people of Israel when the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess Now these are the people of God.

They picture the saved they've come out of Egypt under the blood Look at verse 2 when the Lord your God delivers your enemies over to you You shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them show them. No mercy Don't make marriages with them.

Don't give your daughter to their son. Don't take their daughter for your son For they will turn your

sons away from following me to serve other gods So the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly the people of God can be destroyed if they depart But this thus you shall deal with them destroy their altars break down their pillars cut down their wooden images burn their carved images Why look at verse 6 you are a holy people to the Lord your God The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for himself a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth The Lord did not set his love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people for you were the least of all peoples But because the Lord loves you and because he would keep the oath The promise that he swore to your father's the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of bondage from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt therefore Know something you ought to draw a conclusion in your mind because of this know that the Lord your God is God The faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations to whom? Who is it that God is merciful and faithful to? How does he choose the people to be merciful and faithful to there's a basis for it isn't there? God is merciful and faithful for a thousand generations with those who love him and keep his commandments who makes the Determination of whether we're going to love God and keep his commandments does God determine that or do we? We make that choice. Don't we we decide? That's why there are commands if God made that choice.

We wouldn't need any commands in Scripture Love the Lord your God with all your heart Thou shalt love though This is the first and the greatest of all the commandments Jesus said thou shalt love the Lord thy God by this shall all men know That you're my disciples that you love one another love your neighbor as yourself the decision to love is ours the decision to pursue God is ours and God will keep mercy and faithfulness toward us for a thousand generations when we make that choice Look at verse 10. He repays those who hate him to their face To destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates him.

He will repay him to his face now notice who is Moses? Communicating with here. Did he get up on a at a market square in? Nineveh or in some other ancient city and tell the entire world this he's talking to Israel to the He's talking to the generation of Israelites that came out of Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb They're believers and he's telling them look you've got to make a choice as a believer To pay attention to God and his plan and his calling so that God can continue to be merciful to you and continue to choose you for blessing He will keep covenant and mercy for a thousand generations With those who love him and keep his commandments. He will repay those who hate him to their face to destroy them He will not be slack with him who hates him.

He will repay him to his face. Therefore, you shall keep the commandment, the statutes and the judgments, which I command you today to observe them." Notice, the covenant and the faithfulness and the blessing, they don't depend on faith for salvation, they depend on obedience, right? We're not saved by obedience, we're saved by grace through faith. But our life after salvation depends on obedience.

What do we do with the word of God? Do we prioritize it? Do we recognize that God is God and that we have a calling to understand his plan and to pursue it, to be changed, to be transformed in your mind? Or do we just take our salvation for granted and go off our own way? It is little wonder that people look around and say, why is the world the way it is? Why is my life a mess? Why am I unhappy? Why am I not getting anywhere? Why? And people are going to suffer for ignoring God, both now and in the future. You can go on through Deuteronomy 7, Deuteronomy 8, Deuteronomy 9, Deuteronomy 10. There is a big long sermon here that Moses gives the Israelites, exhorting them to continue to be faithful to God, to pay attention.

This is what life is all about. This is what the future is all about. And that's God's purpose in choosing, is to demonstrate that we have to maintain a connection with Him, even after salvation.

And this is the message throughout the Old Testament. Turn over with me to Jeremiah chapter two. Jeremiah.

We get Job, Psalms, Proverbs. Isaiah is the great big book in the middle of the Old Testament. Then we get Jeremiah.

Jeremiah chapter two. Now remember, Jeremiah is the weeping prophet. Jeremiah is the prophet to Israel when they are under discipline from God because they have disregarded the words of Moses.

They are believers, but they've departed from their God. The word of the Lord came to me, saying, go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, thus says the Lord, I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holiness to the Lord, the first fruits of His increase.

All that devour Him will offend. Disaster will come upon them. Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel.

Now, verse four tells us that this is a message for believers. This is the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord, what injustice have your fathers found in me that they have gone far from me? Did you all found something the matter with me that you don't want to love me and obey me anymore, that you don't care anything about me? This is what God is saying.

They followed idols and have become idolaters. They didn't say, where is the Lord who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and pits, through a land of drought and the shadow of death, through a land that no one crossed and where no one dwelt. I brought you into a bountiful country to eat its fruit and its goodness.

But when you entered, you defiled my land and you made my heritage an abomination. The priest did not say, where is the Lord? And those who handle the law did not know me. The rulers also transgressed against me.

The prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that do not profit. Therefore, I will yet bring charges against you, says the Lord. And against your children's children, I will bring charges.

He talks about going to Cyprus and Kedar and see if there's ever been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? Even the idolaters at least stick with their idols. If they're Baal worshipers, they're faithful to Baal down through the generations.

But look in verse 11, my people have changed their glory for what does not profit. They've turned in the true God for something different. Be astonished, O heavens, at this and be horribly afraid.

Be very desolate, says the Lord. For my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters.

Notice again, God is the source of life. God is the source of any goodness that we have. And instead, they have hewn for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that hold no water.

Is Israel a servant? Is he a home born slave? Why is he plundered? The young lions roar at him and growl. They make his land waste. His cities are burned without inhabitant.

The people of Noth and Tophanes have broken the crown of your head. Have you not brought this on yourself? This is not the capricious arbitrary decision of God. God tells him in verse 17, have you not brought this on yourself? In that you have forsaken the Lord your God.

It doesn't say they never chose him. They were with God and they forsook him. You know, you can't forsake a wife if you've never been married, can you? You can't forsake a husband if you've never been married.

You start out with a relationship and then you forsake. That's what Israel has done. Why take the road to Egypt to drink the waters of Sihel? Why are you going back to the place of bondage? Why are you going back to act like an unbeliever? Why take the road to Assyria to drink the waters of the river? Your own wickedness will correct you and your backslidings will rebuke you.

Know therefore and see that it is an evil, this is verse 19, the second half of it. Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that you have forsaken the Lord your God and the fear of me is not in you, says the Lord God of hosts. This is God's purpose in choosing.

God is demonstrating something. We are accountable for our choices at the point of salvation and afterwards. Here's the people of God in the Old Testament who after they've believed in God and become his people, they've forsaken him and they've gone their own way.

They've disregarded his plan and his purpose. And God says, you have brought this cursing on yourself. The reason your cities are desolate, the reason you're miserable, you brought it on yourself.

The purpose of God in cursing them is to make them know and see that it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake the Lord your God. It's an evil and bitter thing that the fear of God is not in you. Look at verse 20.

A long time ago, God says, I broke your yoke and burst your bonds. I saved you. I delivered you out of Egypt.

And you said, I will not transgress. But on every high hill and every green tree, you lay down and play the harlot. This, of course, these were the places of idol worship.

Yet I planted you as a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. Notice, God took them like a seed and he planted them to be a noble vine, to be a seed of highest quality. Who is it that changed their quality in verse 21? How then have you turned before me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine? God planted them as a noble seed and they have turned into the degenerate plant of an alien vine.

Even though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, your iniquity is marked before me, says the Lord God. Now, look at verse 23. This ties right back to our study of Romans nine.

How can you say I am not polluted? I have not gone after the bales, after the idols. Look at your way in the valley. Know what you have done.

You're a swift dromedary, a swift camel breaking loose in her ways, a wild donkey used to the wilderness that sniffs at the wind in her desire. In her time of mating, who can turn her away? Now, if you've ever seen an animal in heat, if you've ever seen cattle or horses, in this case, the Israelites were familiar with camels and donkeys. When a female is in season, you can build fences, you can tie them up, you can do whatever you want to.

The males and the females are going to get together because that's the desire of their heart. And it's extremely difficult to keep them from fulfilling that desire because they get it in their head that the physical act of union is what they've got to do. And God compares Israel to that kind of desire.

That's what they're pursuing. That's all they care about is the gratification of their desire. All those who seek her will not weary themselves.

In her month, they will find her. Withhold your foot from being unshot and your throat from thirst. But you say there is no hope, for I have loved aliens and after them, I will go.

And if you skip down to verse 27, Israel has become idolatrous. They say to a tree, you are my father. They say to a rock, you gave birth to me.

They have turned their back to me and not their face. And in their time of trouble, they will say, arise and save us. Israel made the choice to go after idols.

God didn't predestine them to be idolaters. They turned, they changed, they chose. And so when calamity comes, they're going to go to God and say, oh, arise and save me.

And this is our classic response. When things get really bad, we say, oh God, help, oh God, save. And in verse 28, God says, where are the gods that you've made for yourselves? Let them arise if they can save you in the time of trouble.

You chose them, you made them. You said, this is my God that gave birth to me. Well, okay, you get that to deliver you and save you.

If they can save you in the time of trouble for according to the number of your cities or your gods. If there are 257 towns in Israel, you've got 257 different gods. Look at verse 29, why will you plead with me? In other words, why are you coming up and trying to defend yourself? Remember verse 23, how can you come up and say, I'm not polluted, I haven't gone after idols.

Why will you plead with me? You all have transgressed against me, says the Lord. In vain, I have chastised your children. They received no correction.

I rebuke, I correct, I instruct, and it doesn't have any effect. You continually stray. You don't respond when I correct, when I discipline, when I rebuke you.

I send prophets to communicate you to what happens to them. Your sword devours your prophets like a destroying lion. Oh, generation, see the word of the Lord in verse 31.

Have I been a wilderness to Israel or a land of darkness? Why do my people say we are lords? We will come no more to you. Can a virgin forget her ornaments or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number. And you go on and he continues with this all the way down.

And look at verse 35. Yet you say, I am innocent. Surely his anger will turn from me.

God's not going to be angry and disciplined with me. I'm innocent, I have done no wrong. And yet God enumerates and recounts all of the departures, all of the rebellion, all of the lack of response, lack of response to discipline in Israel.

Verse 35, he says, behold, I will plead my case against you because you say I have not sinned. They have manifestly sinned. They've got idols as innumerable as the cities in Judah.

And yet they say, I have not sinned. Look at verse 36. Why do you grieve about so much to change your way? You shall be ashamed of Egypt just like you were ashamed of Assyria.

You will go forth from him with your hands on your head for the Lord has rejected your trusted allies and you will not prosper by them. The thrust of this chapter is the people of God have ignored God. They've departed from God.

God has disciplined them. They've not responded to rebuke. And yet they still come to God and say, we're innocent.

What have we done? I am not polluted. I have not gone after the Baals. That's the point of this chapter.

Turn over a few pages. The next book here is Lamentations. Jeremiah and Lamentations both record the words of Jeremiah, the prophecies of Jeremiah.

Look at chapter three of Lamentations. Jeremiah is speaking here and he says, I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light.

Surely he has turned his hand against me time and time again throughout the day. He has aged my flesh and my skin and broken my bones. He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and woe.

He has set me in dark places like the dead of long ago. He has hedged me in so I cannot get out. He has made my chain heavy.

Even when I cry and shout, he shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with hewn stone. He has made my paths crooked.

He's been to me a bear lying in wait like a lion in ambush. He has turned aside my ways and torn me in pieces and made me desolate. He has bent his bow and set me up as a target for the arrow.

Look at verse 16. He's broken my teeth with gravel, covered me with ashes. You have moved my soul far from peace.

I have forgotten prosperity. I said my strength and my hope have perished from the Lord. Remember my affliction in roaming, the warm wood and the gall.

My soul still remembers and sinks within me. This I recall to mind and therefore I have hope. This is believers under discipline.

These are people who are saved, but because of what we saw over there in Jeremiah chapter two, they've come under discipline from God. And Jeremiah as the spokesman for his people, he says, I have absorbed the discipline from God, but I still have hope. He's now picturing the mind of the people where he says, I've got hope.

Look at verse 22. Through the Lord's mercies, we are not consumed. We're not entirely gone.

We're still here because it's the Lord's mercy. And then he says, the Lord is my portion and his

compassions fail not. They are new every morning.

Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore I hope in him.

The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. Now this accounting of all these terrible things, if this was a soul that waited for God and a soul who sought him, it wouldn't have gone through all of that, would it? God is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the deliverance, the salvation, of the Lord.

It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. Let him sit alone and keep silent, because God has laid it on him. Let him put his mouth in the dust.

There may yet be hope. Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and be full of reproach, for the Lord will not cast off forever. Though he causes grief, yet he will show compassion according to the multitude of his mercies." Look at verse 33.

He, the Lord, does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, to crush under one's feet all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the justice due to a man before the face of the Most High, or to subvert a man in his cause. The Lord does not approve that. That's not God's purpose.

God doesn't want to have to do this crushing of teeth with the gravel and so forth. Who is he who speaks, and it comes to pass, if the Lord has not commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed? Why should a living man complain, a man who is receiving the punishment for his sins? God issues both woe and well-being, and it isn't God's will to issue out punishment. That's not God's desire.

He does not afflict willingly, in verse 33. He doesn't grieve the children of men. That's not his goal and his purpose.

Verse 25, the Lord is good to those who wait for him and to the soul that seeks him. That's God's purpose in choosing, I will honor those who honor me. If you dishonor God, you're going to receive rebuke and discipline, and God's purpose is to turn us and to change us.

As you continue on in Lamentations 3, verse 42, we have transgressed and rebelled. You have not pardoned. You've covered yourself with anger and pursued us.

You have slain and not pitied. You have covered yourself with a cloud so that prayer will not pass through. As believers, we can get ourselves so far off that God's not going to hear our prayers.

We can't disregard God, disregard his plan, disregard his word and his purpose, and go along and then suddenly in a bind, shoot up a prayer to God and say, oh God, help, and God says, oh sure, no problem, and give us a blessing and give us deliverance. We can put ourselves in a position where God is not going to hear our prayers. Parents do this with children, don't we? We

warn a child, we say, you'd better be careful, you'd better watch out, and if we're willful as children and we disregard our parents and we go our own way, often our parents are going to let us suffer the consequences of our bad choices, aren't they? They're going to say, fine, that's what you choose.

I tried to warn you, you wouldn't listen. You're just going to have to go out there and suffer on your own and find out the results. You've covered yourself with a cloud, in verse 44, that prayer should not pass through.

You have made us an off-scouring and refuse in the midst of the peoples. All our enemies open their mouths against us, fear and a snare have come upon us, desolation and destruction. My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people.

My eyes flow and do not cease without interruption until the Lord from heaven looks down and sees. My eyes bring suffering to my soul because of all the daughters of my city. He goes on to talk about how the enemies have destroyed and so forth.

And the point here, if you go on through both Jeremiah and Lamentations, is we determine what the attitude of God is going to be toward us. And many times when we're disobedient, we come up to God and we say, I'm not disobedient, I haven't sinned. We saw this in Malachi.

All through the book, Israel would come to God and God would give them an accusation and say, you've dishonored me, you've defiled my altar. And Israel would come back and say, in what way have we defiled? In what way? We haven't sinned. We haven't polluted.

We've done no wrong. We haven't gone after the bales. And would gloss over and ignore what God perceives when he looks on the heart.

Turn back now to Romans chapter 9, verse 18, he has mercy on whom he wills and whom he wills he hardens. God wants to have mercy. We just saw in Lamentations, it isn't God's purpose and it's not God's will to harden, to discipline, to destroy.

We bring it on ourselves. And look at verse 19. Doesn't this remind you of what we just saw in Jeremiah and Lamentations, what we saw before in Malachi? You will say to me, why does he yet find fault? Who has resisted his will? This doesn't say who can resist his will, why is God disciplining us because there's no way we can resist his will.

These people are saying, we haven't resisted his will. Who of us has been disobedient? Who of us has gone after the bales? Who of us has polluted his way? Who of us has defiled his altars? This is the classic response of the disobedient in Israel. When they start getting disciplined, they say, why is God bringing calamity on us? What have we done wrong? We're still offering sacrifices, we're still observing the feasts, when all the time they're going after the bales and they're disregarding God in their heart.

God sees into the heart. We saw in Psalm 33, it's God that fashions the heart. God knows what's going on in the heart.

And if we're disregarding God in the heart, he's not fooled by our facade, he's not fooled by our hypocrisy, he's not fooled by the things that may fool people. Man looks on the outward appearance, the Lord looks on the heart. And when God looks in the heart and sees disobedience and rebellion, disregard and dishonor for the things of God, God will discipline.

And it's futile for us to do like Israel and come up and say, in what way have we transgressed? How have we defiled? We haven't gone after the bales. God knows. God sees into the heart.

And God is judging the thoughts and intents of the heart. And this is Paul's point in Romans chapter 9, verse 20. But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Shall the thing formed say to him who formed it, why have you made me like this? Does not the potter have power over the clay from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? This goes right back to verse 18.

He will have mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and whom he wants to, he will harden. Now why does God want to have mercy? Why does he want to harden some? It's because of our choices. God says, I will honor those who honor me.

God does not want to discipline, but he will if we bring it on ourselves. And out of the same lump of clay, this reminds us of what we saw in Jeremiah chapter 2. Didn't I take Israel like a seed and plant them to be a vine of honor? And they changed and they became a degenerate plant and an alien vine. God's purpose was for them to be a holy people that would reflect his glory.

And they changed themselves and became something else. And God had to discipline them as a result. This is the message of scripture.

This is the illustration of Israel. This is what Romans 9 is talking about. Do not be deceived.

Do not be wrongly informed about what this chapter is talking about. This is not talking about arbitrary choices that God makes as to who's going to be saved and who's going to be condemned. This chapter is talking about God's purpose in choosing.

And God's purpose is to demonstrate that if we honor God, he will honor us. If we disregard God, even if we're believers, we will receive very horrendous things. If you take the time to read through Jeremiah 2 and Lamentations 3, if you take the time to read, God says the nations are going to look and be astonished.

The heavens are going to look down and be shocked at what happens to those who disregard God. The potter has power over the clay from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor. What if God, wanting to show his wrath and to make his power known,

endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath, prepared for destruction, so that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory? Now, we get to this and we say, you know, Sam, I hear what you're saying.

I see what the scripture is saying. But when you get to this part here, vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, that sure looks like unbelievers to me. We're going to pause here and take our break.

And when we come back, we're going to take a look at what the Bible says about vessels of wrath. But let's pause here and take a break.