

96-11-17a

As we continue our worship this morning, let's turn in our Bibles to Ephesians chapter 1. As we've just seen in our hymn to God be the glory, the glory of God is paramount in His plan. It's a phrase that expresses His desire to make Himself known. And that's the section of Romans 9 that we're in.

And our scripture reading in Ephesians chapter 1 gives us some idea of the content. It's easy to say the glory of God, but what are we talking about when we talk about God's greatness? What is it that we should understand when we think about His glory? In Ephesians chapter 1 verse 3, Paul begins a doxology that introduces his thoughts in this letter. He says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

We've seen this concept in Romans, haven't we? That God's purpose before the world was founded was to take those people who would trust in Him in this particular age after the coming of Jesus Christ and fit them to a special purpose to unite us with Jesus Christ and unite us with Him not only positionally but also with His destiny, with His status as the heir of God and so forth. And that's what he's talking about here when he says, He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. He chose this dispensation to take believers and unite them with Jesus Christ and His purpose, His calling for us is that we should be holy and without blame.

That's a potential. It's not a foreordained conclusion for every believer, but that's God's purpose. That's what He chose us as a category to do.

Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself. The adoption as sons is unique to this age. Unity with Christ, union with Christ is unique to this age.

Sharing Christ's sonship, His heirship, His priesthood, His destiny and so forth is unique to this age. That's not a part of the covenant that promises to believers in other ages. He predestined us in this age to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence. Notice that the riches of God's grace abound to us in wisdom and prudence. We have many expressions of God's grace in salvation, but the riches of His grace continue to come to us as we grow.

So that, in verse 10, in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both those which are in heaven and those which are on the earth in Him. And God is resolving the issues of angelic or heavenly creation history as well as earthly creation history in this age. This is the dispensation of the fullness of the times.

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance. We've just done a fairly detailed study on inheritance, what it means to be the seed, what it means to be an heir according to promise, what are the specifications of the promise. It's like the conditions in someone's will in order to inherit.

Often, occasionally people will put conditions in the will. If so and so will function as the president of my company, I will them all of my stock in the company and so forth. So we have obtained an inheritance being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His own will.

The destiny that we have as believers in this age is to be heirs. That's God's calling. That's His purpose for us.

Being predestined doesn't mean that it's going to take place. It means that that's our destiny. We're not Israelites.

We're not from the pre-flood age. We're not millennial believers. We're not tribulational saints.

We in this age have a destiny. God has designed us or purposed us to be heirs, co-heirs with Christ. So that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

In Him you also trusted after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee or this word in Greek is *Erebon*. It means the pledge or it was the word used of a pawn ticket. It's something that you hold in lieu of something that you will redeem that for later on.

He is the guarantee or the pledge of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of His glory. Obviously if you grieve and quench the Spirit, if you deny the activity and the ministry of the Spirit in your life, you're going to wind up with having lost your ticket so to speak in terms of the pledge of the inheritance. We in our study of inheritance saw that inheritance is conditioned upon faith.

It's conditioned upon being a child of promise and not giving away the inheritance or denying it. Therefore I also after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you making mention of you in my prayers. Now in verse 17 and following, this is what Paul prays.

If you think about this, the greatest of the apostles thinking about a church of believers growing in grace, what is his hope for them? What does he pray will happen in their case? We have that right here. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge, the epinosis here of Him. This is a human spirit characterized by wisdom.

Wisdom is the timeless truths and doctrines pertaining to God and His plan. Revelation here is

the specifics of the mystery doctrines, the church age things that had been hidden in times past but are now revealed. So we have not only our Old Testament truth but also our New Testament truth.

Paul prays that God can give them a spirit that is characterized by these things in the full knowledge, the epinosis of Him. The eyes of your understanding having been enlightened. And if your Bible says anything else, that's a past participle there.

That's a perfect participle. The eyes of your understanding have been enlightened. God has given us the ability to understand these things for the purpose of or so that you may know these things.

And now He's going to give us three specific things that God has enlightened us and given us the ability to understand. One is the hope of His calling. What is the expectation of the calling of believers in this particular age? He's just given us details of it in the preceding section so that we may know that hope, that expectation of His calling.

Secondly, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance among the saints? What is it that the saints should inherit? Reflects the glory of God. Thirdly, what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe? There is God's calling here. There is the riches of the glory of His inheritance.

And there is the greatness of His power. This is what Paul prays that believers in this church and by extension believers in this age will come to appreciate. Notice he doesn't pray that they'll impact their communities.

He doesn't pray that they will engage in ministries. He doesn't pray that they will do good deeds because he knows that all of those things will flow out of this fulfillment. What is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ? And in this section here we have all five Greek words for power.

Energeo and dunamis and so forth. The exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him in His right hand in the heavenly places. We've seen in our recent studies the close comparison and link between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and our life as believers.

Christ died to sin and lives to God and we are called to do the same thing. Far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named not only in this age but also in the age which is to come. He put all things under His feet and gave Him to be head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

This is a description and an explanation of the glory of God as it's revealed in us in this age. It talks about the potential and the opportunity that we have. That's going to be our subject this

morning as we continue in Romans chapter 9. And if you'll turn with me now to Romans 9 we'll continue and push forward toward the conclusion of this particular chapter.

And as we do so, let's stop for a moment and just remember where we are. It's easy in a fairly detailed study such as we have in Romans to get down into the details and the principles and doctrines and lose sight of the fact that this is a letter that has a unified message. It has a theme.

It's not just a collection of random thoughts but it's arguing for a point. We've established in the introduction and as we've gone through these first eight and a half chapters that Paul is writing to believers about our lives in this age. After salvation, what? That's the question that this letter addresses and answers.

The wrong answer that so many in that day had accepted was that we need to go out and do good deeds. Their definition of good deeds was contained in the Law of Moses. That's what we should do.

And we'll look around and measure ourselves and measure each other by whether or not we're doing these good deeds. Unfortunately, that's the same case today. Many of us as believers, consciously or unconsciously, that's how we measure.

We can be made to feel guilty if we're not engaging in certain acts or doing certain things. And we think we've got this licked and we think we have it overcome and then we have holiday season coming up and many of us are going to be interacting with family members and many of us can remember having had this same experience in years gone by where we understand this, we recognize it, we make our decisions and plan our activities on the understanding that God is looking at what goes on in our soul and that that's where the battle is won or lost. And yet, suddenly, in the presence of other believers, maybe believers from a previous church or believers from our family or people we haven't seen in a while, we get back together with them and suddenly we find ourselves feeling the need to justify or to defend or to somehow explain why it is that we're not doing the things that these people consider to be basic parts of the Christian life.

And that's the whole issue, what people consider to be rather than what God considers to be. That's what this whole book is argued for because inevitably, if you pick a false standard and measure yourself and others by a false standard, you're going to be violating and not measuring up the true standard. And that's what Paul points out at the beginning of this letter.

He said, you find it easy, according to your standard, to look around and condemn people. We have a common standard. We know what evil is.

We know what sin is. And in chapter 1, he says, look at all the unbelievers and all the terrible ungodly things that they do. And then in chapter 2, he wakes up his audience and he says, and you, oh man, who are you to sit pointing the finger at them when you yourself are doing the very same thing? And immediately people are going to say, well, now wait a minute.

I'm not an unbeliever. I'm not out there doing all these things. But Paul points out in chapter 2 and in chapter 3 that if we're not engaged in pursuing righteousness by faith, even as believers, we fall under the same condemnation.

God is just as unhappy with righteousness by works after salvation as he is before salvation. And he goes on in chapter 3 to talk about Israel who tried to justify themselves under the law. And he says, look, the law was a means of demonstrating that even the people of God couldn't be righteous and couldn't generate righteous out of their own steam and that trying to keep a standard of activity doesn't do the job.

And he says, the law, which was for believers, for the nation of Israel, by condemning them, demonstrates that the whole world is guilty before God. If the people of God can't generate righteousness unless they operate in faith, what does that say about the rest of the world? It's an a fortiori argument. If the chosen and the redeemed fall short of the glory of God when they try to produce works in their own efforts, what's that going to say about people that aren't even redeemed? By extension, the whole world is guilty before God.

Then in chapter 4, Paul turns this argument toward the positive side and he says, God is looking for righteousness by faith. He says, look at Abraham. Before he had been circumcised, before he had taken Isaac on top of the mountain, God declared him righteous.

Why? Because he believed God and he acted on that belief. He didn't make Ishmael his son and his heir. There was a movie they had recently on Abraham and it's in the same vein as some of the others we've seen with Jacob and some of these others that are real well done.

And they made this point amazingly in the movie that I believe George C. Scott was playing Abraham and his wife's handmaid there, Hagar, comes up to George C. Scott in the movie and says, why do you not do the ceremony and the ritual that establishes Ishmael as your heir? Why will Ishmael not be the recipient of all of your things? And Abraham says, God has promised me a son and I'm waiting for that. There was a little flaw in the movie because he says, God has told me that in Isaac my seed will be called. Well, of course, Isaac hadn't been named at that point, hadn't even been born yet.

But the point there is they did a good job of expressing Abraham's faith and not only did he believe God but he acted on that. He didn't make Ishmael his heir. He didn't give up on any hope of he and Sarah having a child.

That's where the righteousness was declared by God. It has nothing to do with salvation. It isn't a matter of Abraham suddenly coming to faith in God.

And that's the point in the letter to the Romans, which is the letter to us in this age, believers in this age, is that righteousness comes by trusting God. And this is not talking about the issue of deliverance. It's talking about justification before God in time.

How do we please God? How do we walk the worthy walk? How are we declared faithful and good servants? It's not by going out and seeking to punch a ticket or impress people with what we're doing or what kind of impact we're having. But the beauty in a perverse sense of that system is how easily it distracts us. People who promote this, and I think the adversary himself promotes this amongst believers because it neutralizes us and it plays right into our instincts.

We have an inborn desire to be well thought of. We have an inborn mechanism that tells us that if we work hard, we've justified ourself. We've made up for something.

We've dug a hole by failing, but now we've filled in the hole by working. And it's attractive to us in the desires of the heart level. And we feel like we have somehow compensated God for any failures or any lack of diligence in one area by working very hard in another.

And it's easy to be deceived, and it's easy to deceive ourselves in this regard. And it's especially easy when we find that that's the accepted system in the eyes of those around us. And that's what tends to happen in the Christian community in general is that everyone accepts this as a standard.

We see this idea of the standard being set by the group even today. What would have been thought completely odd and strange and bizarre just a few decades ago is now accepted as commonplace. You look at the quality of the dialogue on television programs where in the past Desi and Lucy had to sleep in single beds.

Now you can't hardly turn your television on without winding up in someone's bedroom. The raising of children, and we've talked about this this past week, the medicating of children to try to get them to behave and to not run amok is considered normal and scientifically valid and proper and needful, and what a shame that people didn't have the chance to medicate their children before. And because it's accepted in society and accepted in one's peer group, people sometimes don't even stop and think about how bizarre that is that for thousands of years we have had structures in the society, the home and the authority of the parents and the training that takes place and in some cases the corporal discipline, the spanking or the other forms of enforcement that take place that prepare someone for life and teach them to function in a society that's governed by rules and that should be motivated by principles.

Instead we hope to medicate ourselves so that we don't give in to the desires of our heart. That's what has happened in the Christian community and by and large in the grand picture we've accepted a standard of righteousness by works. We're supposed to change the world.

We're supposed to stop crimes from happening. We're supposed to picket. We're supposed to crusade.

We're supposed to make a difference. People that are in our periphery should be changing because we are in their periphery and we have lost sight of the scriptural principle. When you

look at the scriptures, we are not the agent of change.

We are not the agent of change. We are a witness to the agent of change. We are a demonstration of what the agent of change can do.

But it's only the power of God that can change the human heart and it isn't our modeling or it isn't our counsel, it isn't our peer pressure that is going to change another person. It isn't our example that's going to change another person. The most our example can do is communicate what the truth of God can do and what the spirit of God can do and we've completely lost sight of that and we feel that it's our calling to change people and it's not.

It's God's business to change. It's the work of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God to transform. Do we really think that we have the ability to renew the inner man, to be a critic of the thoughts and intents of the heart? We try to elbow the Holy Spirit out of the way.

We try to elbow the Word of God out of the way when we seek to make someone change, when we want to, quote, make a difference in someone's life and we justify this and we say, oh, well, I've got a burden for this person and God has laid them on my heart and so forth and that's nonsense. We misunderstand our calling. Our calling is to righteousness by faith.

Each person, each believer has been called to that and we stand or fall based on what goes on in our soul. We can't point to others and say, but look at what a difference I made in that person's life over there. God's saying, I want to know what difference I made in your soul.

That's the standard of measurement and that's what Paul is pointing out here. So, if this is the case and if historically the people of God have missed that point, then why did God let that go on so long? Why has Israel been the people of God and the nation of God for 1,400 years at the point that Paul is writing? What about Israel? If they've missed the boat and didn't grab onto righteousness by faith, why has God kept them as His people and why has He continued to set them up to be the custodians and the recipients of His presence and so forth? That's the question that Paul is answering here in Romans 9. He says, I have great sorrow and grief in my heart. I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ.

This is loss of all of the benefits, loss of the inheritance. This is not loss of salvation, but this is having the portion of the hypocrites, having the portion of the unfaithful servants who are on the outside, the darkness which is outside. Paul says, I could be out there amongst the truly least in the kingdom for the sake of my brethren.

My countrymen according to the flesh. And you recall in verse 4, he says, there are Israelites to whom pertains the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises of whom are the fathers and from whom Christ came. Now, who is it that that applies to? Does that apply to church age believers? If you stop and think about it, if any man is in Christ in this age, he's a new creation.

Old things are passed away. He is the recipient of a new covenant founded on new and better promises. You recall that in Hebrews.

There's much mention of the new covenant in Christ that the blood of Christ serves a much better purpose than the blood of Abel and so forth. What Paul is talking about here is he's backing up and looking historically, what about Israel? What about the people of God who wound up going out in captivity, who wound up missing the boat, and even now in this day continue to promote the system of failure that took them out of God's plan and out of God's purpose all through the previous age. They are the ones to whom pertain the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service and the promises and so forth.

That service is synonymous with the fulfilling of the ritual worship of the law. It isn't that the Word of God has taken no effect. They are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children.

And then he goes into the distinction in the realm of believers, in the realm of the people of God, you have a distinction. There are those who are children of promise and those who are not. There are those who are going to inherit and those who are not.

They're all children, but they're not all heirs. And in the section that we have just concluded, we have seen that it is faith that distinguishes one group from the other. And God's purpose in choosing is to honor those who honor Him, to honor those who express faith.

And even in the expressing of faith, it's God's glory that is the issue. And that's why he says in verse 11, it is not of works, it is of Him who calls. In verse 16 he says, it is not of Him who wills, nor of Him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

God's purpose in showing mercy to those who express faith is not to make a big deal out of them, but to reveal His glory, to demonstrate His mercy and His compassion. And he quotes the Scripture in verse 17, For this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth. It says that's God's purpose in raising Pharaoh up.

But what's the whole identity of Pharaoh? What does Pharaoh represent? Pharaoh is the leader of Egypt. What does Egypt represent? Egypt represents bondage. It represents enslavement to sin.

It represents the bondage and the enslavement to sin that we experienced before salvation. God allowed the 400 years of bondage for Israel and raised up Pharaoh and executed the deliverance of Israel from Egypt for this purpose, that He might show His power and that His name might be declared in all the earth. And this communicates something very important to us.

People are always saying, Why does God allow evil in the world? Why did God allow the fall in the garden? Why does God let us be born, conceived in iniquity and born in sin, and we start out

separated from God, aliens and strangers from the life of God and relationship with God? Why did God let that ever come about in human history? This is the answer. Pharaoh and Egypt represent that situation. Why did God raise Pharaoh up? It's the exact same reason He let Satan rule the earth.

It's the exact same reason He let Adam fall and let man be born in iniquity. In a room that is completely filled with light, there are no shadows and there's nothing to distinguish the light from the darkness. You simply have white everywhere.

Anyone who has received training in art, whether it's graphic art or painting or anything else, you know that it's the interplay of light and shadow that gives form and definition to the things that are in the picture. And God, because He created free will, it is inevitable that in the exercise of free choice, some creatures are going to choose against Him. Well, now, what's God going to do with that? Is God going to watch and sit there with a laser beam and as soon as some creature turns negative, just zap them out of existence? God is turning what starts out to be bad, what starts out to be a curse and a blight in the universe.

He's working it together for good. He's taking the existence of those who choose against Him, the existence of the negative creation, and He's using it for something. If something bad is inevitable, if it's going to happen just by virtue of creating free will, then let's make use of it.

Let's get something out of it. This is a principle that we follow in life, don't we? We teach this to our children. We try to tell them things, but inevitably they're not going to believe everything we say, take it as fact, and treat it as gospel for the rest of their lives.

We were riding bicycles the other day, and if you've ever had a child and you're trying to teach them the rules of the road, the fact that there are cars, that there are other people on bicycles and so forth, we communicate and we say, you've got to be careful. You can't get so caught up in riding the bike that you forget to look when you cross an alley or when you go into the street. When you're riding along, you need to be aware of what's around you.

Well, we can say that and say that, and academically the child can understand that. We can explain what could happen, but it doesn't seem to impress them and it doesn't seem to really become a part of their reality in their soul until they disregard it and run into someone else or are struck by a car or see someone have an accident because they weren't paying attention. And the experience of that teaches a far stronger lesson, and there are times when as parents we have to let our children experience the consequences of bad decisions because it makes a far stronger and more lasting impression than simply telling them.

And it's one of the principles that guides child training. Rather than isolating children in a germ-free bubble and simply telling them, this is better for you, we have to let them interact with a fallen and evil world and while they're under our roof and while they're under our influence, teach them how to cope with those unpleasant, unhappy, sinful and evil things. And they have to experience

it.

It's not enough to isolate them and tell them that this is the way it is. God has that same experience with us. We learn by experience in many cases far better than we learn by principle.

So God is taking the existence of those who are negative and he's working it into the fulfillment of his purpose and he's using it to make a point. If Satan and the heavenly creation that followed him in rejecting God are going to exist and do that, God is going to use it. He's going to make them an example.

He's going to teach the remainder of his creation from their example. And it's going to reveal something about God that we would never see if he simply obliterated them immediately. As soon as they had a negative thought, they disappeared out of the universe.

The rest of us would simply say, my goodness, it seems like there were a lot more creatures around here yesterday than there are today. I wonder what happened to them. We would have no greater insight into God or his character or what he values or why he is to be glorified, why he is great and glorious in his character and in the standards that he maintains.

We see that in his interaction with those who have fallen. That's where Paul is going here. He says this is why God raised Pharaoh up.

This is why God has allowed the human race to be perpetuated with so many unbelievers. It's why we're all born in sin and are required to see the issue of our need and come to Jesus Christ. Therefore, in verse 18, he has mercy on whom he wills, and whom he wills, he hardens.

And we've seen in our study of that hardening, in fact, I was just reading, I think even in the Bible knowledge commentary from Dallas Seminary, they make this point that a good translation of this is make stubborn, to make stubborn. Whom he wills, he makes stubborn. Now stop and think about it.

What is stubbornness? If I have the ability to take someone and make them stubborn, what am I doing? What is the quality of stubbornness? It means when you set your mind on a particular course, nothing changes it. You're unmovable. You're stubborn.

You don't change. You don't go a different direction. To make someone stubborn doesn't mean to make them negative.

It means to make them consistent in what they have chosen. It doesn't say that God makes some people choose him and makes other people choose against him. But what he does do, those who choose for him, he is able to have mercy on.

And those who choose against him, he makes them stubborn. He is going to cause them to demonstrate what they have chosen and to stick with what they have chosen. And in his

judgment and discipline of them, he's going to teach the rest of creation things about himself.

It would be a very difficult lesson to see if we didn't know what was going on in someone's heart. Someone appears to be moral and wonderful and pleasant and so on, and then God tosses them in the lake of fire or God denies them blessing and reward in the future. We say, well, I wonder why God did that.

Well, they have been masters of hypocrisy. They put on a facade that fooled us. If God makes them stubborn and causes them to work out in their practice and in their activities what's in their heart, then when he brings discipline and judgment on them, we're going to see why it is.

Well, here's a person that has a stiff neck and a hard heart, and God time and again approaches them and they reject and deny and refuse and disregard and have apathy and so forth. So by making stubborn, God is going to use them to accomplish a good purpose, which is to teach us about himself. So now coming back to Israel, Paul says in verse 19, Well, you will say to me, Why does he still find fault? For who has resisted his will? Who of us has resisted his will? Why is God making us object lessons? We're not in that category.

We shouldn't be the ones who are being made stubborn and are receiving the discipline from God. We've been faithful. We've been good.

And Paul, going back to the Old Testament, says, Indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? This is generally presented as being an argument, Who are you to question why God does what he does? He's God. He can do what he wants to do and you shouldn't ask any questions about, Is this right or is this fair? He's God and it's wrong to question him. Now we don't tolerate that kind of attitude even in human society.

Some of us are old enough to remember Lieutenant William Calley in the Vietnam War when he received orders to go and exterminate people in the village of My Lai. Well, he was court-martialed for that. Why? Because those were bad orders, at least in the picture of the trial, as I understand it, in the situation as I understand it.

There wasn't sufficient cause to warrant exterminating women and children in that village. And what's the point? We hold someone responsible just because they're under authority. We don't say, Well, you're under authority.

You shouldn't question what's going on. We all have a responsibility to do what's right and if our orders are bad, we shouldn't carry them out. That's what the Nazi war crime trials were all about.

Nazis received the orders from Goebbels and Goering and so forth. It doesn't change the fact that they should not have run the death camps. But in Christianity, in some forms of theology, we say, He's God.

This is the way it is and you shouldn't question it. You shouldn't think about it. You shouldn't attempt to understand it.

And yet at the same time, we're encouraged to be like God. Well, if we don't understand God, how can we be like him? And fortunately, that's not the calling at all. When he says, Indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? This goes back to what we've seen in the Old Testament with the potter and the clay.

Do you think that the potter doesn't know what kind of clay he's got in his hands? Are you going to presume that God doesn't know what's going on in your heart? That God doesn't understand that you're pursuing a wrong standard? Do you think you can fool God, in other words, is the objection. Will the thing formed say to him, Deformed 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? Now, we pick up this morning in verse 22. What if God, wanting to show wrath and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath, prepared for destruction, and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had prepared beforehand for glory.

That's what we've been talking about this morning. God puts up with those who choose against him. God puts up with failure.

God puts up with unfaithfulness. In the broad sense, God puts up with the unbelieving world so that he can work out the plan of salvation for those who respond. And in the believing world, in the world of believers, God puts up with the faithless for the sake of the faithful.

The first case you can see in the story of Lot. We've been talking about Abraham and so forth. Remember what happened with Lot, Sodom, and Gomorrah? There's a great... This same movie with George C. Scott as Abraham had a great scene there where the angels go to Sodom and stay with Lot and they blind the inhabitants and they tell Lot that he and his family must leave and then the city is destroyed and Lot's wife looks around and turns into quite a very convincing pillar of salt.

That's the best pillar of salt I've seen is in that movie. If you ever get a chance to see that, I think that's probably what it looked like. But what's the point there? Abraham engages in an argument with God or a bargaining session with God.

Will you spare the city for the sake of 50? And God says He will. What's He saying there? I will put up with all of the evil and all of the horrible goings on in Sodom for the sake of 50 righteous. And the number keeps dropping in this bargaining session.

And he finally gets down to 10. Abraham says, Lord, if there are 10 righteous, will you spare the city? And God says He will. That's what this is saying right here.

God will endure with great patience negative people, disobedient people. And we're talking in general terms here. Whether you want to talk about unbelievers for the sake of believers or whether you want to talk about faithless believers for the sake of the faithful.

God will endure with great patience those that are going to be objects of His wrath so that He can reveal His glory to the vessels of mercy. That's His purpose. People that ask the question, why does God allow sin and suffering? It's for the sake of those who will respond to God.

It's to teach us something about God and about everything that is not God. And we're going to have an appreciation for all eternity of what it's like to be apart from God when we remember this world and we remember how society functions without God. How desires of the heart function apart from God.

It's going to make an impression on us that a simple statement in a germ-free vacuum would never make on us. And God puts up with this and puts up with the abuse and the rejection and the disregard and the dishonoring and the trampling underfoot of the Son of God. He puts up with all of that so that He can reveal His glory so that His power and His name will be declared.

That's what Paul is telling us here. The specific context here goes back to what we just reviewed at the beginning of this chapter. What got this discussion started? It's the question, what about Israel? If Israel's been off the mark, why are they still here? Why did God continue to have them be His people if they were off the mark and went out under all these captivities? What was the point? That's the question He's answering here.

This answers the question, what about Israel? What about the quote-unquote people of God in the previous age? God wanted to show His wrath and to make His power known and He has endured with much patience. This is makrophumia. It's the same word that's listed in the fruit of the Spirit as patience.

God endured. This is pharoah, to bear or to carry, P-H-E-R-O. And it's to bear a burden, to go along under the weight of something, to endure with great patience the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.

And that's that word apolia that we studied a week or two ago, ruin. And we saw that in the New Testament that word almost uniformly is used for the fate of faithless believers, those who deny the Lord that bought them, whose ruin was foretold long ago. Remember over there in Peter and in Jude where it says that their destruction was ordained a long time ago? That's what Paul's talking about here.

In the same way that our destiny in Christ was ordained before the foundation of the world, we who trust in Christ would be to the praise of His glory, so has the opposite. And in this sense there is such a thing as double predestination, not in the Reformed sense of destination to heaven or destination to hell, but in the sense of the fate that awaits those who pursue

righteousness by faith versus those who do not. The consequences of that have already been determined by God in eternity past.

Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. If you think about it, salvation doesn't come to us by sowing and reaping, does it? That would be salvation by works.

You've got to plant something and harvest it and then you'll have salvation. That passage is addressed to believers. He that sows to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.

It's the wrath of God. It's ruin. It's apolia.

It's loss of inheritance, loss of reward, loss of opportunity for function, loss of the opportunity to reflect the glory of God in a positive sense. But he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap what? Life everlasting, everlasting life. The phrase that we've always associated with salvation, but that actually comprehends fulfilling the purpose of God as a believer.

Life that partakes of the eternal, the inheritance, the fulfillment of the promises. How do we get that? We sow to the Spirit and that's something that we do. It's something that we pursue.

God endures with great patience the vessels of wrath prepared for ruin. Many of us as believers are headed for ruin at the judgment seat of Christ. We will answer for everything, whether bad or good.

Go back and read Romans chapter 2 again to see the fate of different classes of believers. That He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory. This is the pre-designation that we've seen throughout Romans.

Union with Christ in His glory. Even now if we are united with Christ in His suffering, in His being misunderstood by the world, in His pursuing the path of God and to the great consternation and confusion of those around Him, even His own disciples were confused by His priorities and by His thinking. A great crowd would assemble outside the doors and He would leave in the darkness and go to another town.

They couldn't understand that. Why is He doing that? We share the sufferings of Christ in this age and we will share His glory in the next. Believers who are faithful.

And that's what He says again in verse 24. Even us whom He called, not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles. And He's talking about the contradistinction of faithful believers in this age with the unfaithful.

Of the opportunity in this age to concentrate on righteousness by faith in contrast with the previous age which concentrated on the fact that we fall short of the glory of God in our own strength. There's a different point to be made. We have a different calling.

Remember Romans 8, 28? God is working all things together for the good, for the accomplishment of His purpose. In the case of those who love God, in the case of those who are the called according to His purpose, we make that choice. We saw last time that in Timothy, Paul says, if a man will distance himself, separate from sin, pursue the plan of God, righteousness by faith, he will be a vessel of honor and not a vessel of dishonor.

We choose what kind of vessel we're going to be. We choose what kind of clay we are. And in one of our topical studies upcoming on Friday night, we're going to go back and do a thorough study on the concept of the potter and the clay which we reviewed in summary form here.

Every place in the Bible where you find the imagery of the potter and the clay, the pot sherds, you find God dealing with His own people in discipline. It's a picture connected with discipline for faithless believers in every single passage. Let's pause now and take our break and when we come back, we will see why Paul chooses at this point to stop and quote from the Old Testament.

He's just turned to the fate of New Testament church-age believers and yet now he's going to go back and quote from the Old Testament. We'll find out what that's about when we return.