

96-12-15a

As we continue our worship this morning, I'd like to ask Paul Thompson if he'll ask God's blessing as we study God's Word. Amen. As we continue our worship this morning, let's turn to Romans chapter 9. Our scripture reading this morning came from Hebrews chapter 11, and we noted there the definition of faith that begins the chapter.

We know that that chapter contains the roster of the faithful from the Old Testament, and we know that the author of Hebrews makes a point of telling us that the Old Testament scriptures, the history of Israel that's recorded there, is written for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come. And he gives that roster, and we saw toward the end of Hebrews 11, where he says that these all died in faith, not having received the promise, so that without us they would not be made complete. And that's how the chapter ends.

They believed the promise of God, and they lived in the light of that. Some of them had great victories and great deliverances. Others endured great trials and were scourged and mocked and sawn asunder and so forth.

Notice that that chapter points out the fact that from the human point of view, some people appeared very successful and others appeared to have a very rough go and a sort of a disgraceful fate in the eyes of the world. But they died in faith, believing in the promise, not having received the promise, because something had to happen before that promise could be fulfilled. That's what we're going to see this morning in Romans chapter 9. Once again, just briefly, we need to set the stage in our mind of where we are.

This book, this letter to the Romans, is talking about the life of believers. It's not an evangelism book. It's not a handbook on salvation, although it references eternal salvation from time to time, but it primarily addresses itself to believers and seeks to address the question, how should we now live? We're not going to live like believers have lived in times past.

Paul is writing to the first generation of the church and is revealing the mysteries, the things that were not known in earlier days, and it's a big change. It's a traumatic change for people who have had their minds set in a different way. We face that same problem today.

Some of us have grown up in Christian homes. Some of us have spent a lot of time in church, whether we were saved as children or as adults, and there is a Christian culture and there's a Christian tradition and there is an accepted way of operating as a believer that is perceived as being the right thing. This is the Christian life.

We think that certain people are engaged in full-time Christian service because they are a pastor or a missionary or they work in some ministry and are paid for it. We, by implication, believe that the rest of us are not in full-time Christian service, and we tend to view the operation of our Christianity in those terms, that it's external. It's what you do that qualifies as Christian service.

We've seen through our study of Romans as elsewhere in the Scriptures that that is a wrong-headed view. That's not what God's plan is about in this age. God is operating inside.

He is at work in us to will and to do His good purpose, and His purpose is not to send us forth to evangelize the world. That's not His primary purpose. You go to almost any church in America today and say, what's the goal of the church? They're going to say, to win the lost, to evangelize.

That is a goal. That is a function, but it is no more the mission of believers in this age than the mission of a military service is to recruit, to convert civilians to being uniformed personnel. That's not the mission.

It's an essential function, and it's important, and there are people who are dedicated full-time to that mission, to that military occupational specialty, but that's not the mission of the organization. That's not its reason for being, nor is it the reason for our being. We are not to take the commission that Jesus gave to the eleven disciples alone at the inception of the church and adopt that and write it on our flag and go forth and ignore God's purpose for us, but that's what the Christian church is doing today.

It's wrong. It's not scriptural. It's not biblical.

Look at the emphasis. Pick any book of the New Testament and see if the emphasis of that book is going out and winning the lost. See if there is an imperative in any of the epistles to the church, in any of the writings of Paul that says, go forth and impact your community.

Go forth and win the lost. Find it and we'll go back and redo Romans. It's not there, and there's a reason why it's not there.

People say, oh, well, it was just assumed in the early church. Well, that's amazing to me because nothing else was assumed. Fornication and idolatry and licentiousness and backbiting and divisions and schisms and heresy and falsehood and everything else was recognized and dealt with.

Are we to assume that there's no imperative in the epistles that deals with the primary mission of the church? It makes no sense. We are caught in a stream of thinking that is erroneous, just as the recipients of this letter were caught in a stream of thinking and a culture and an accepted way of operating that wasn't valid. Paul wrote this letter to focus on the real mission, the real purpose that God has.

That purpose is righteousness by faith, to please God, to be rewarded by God, to receive the inheritance, to shine like stars in the kingdom of the Father. Ultimately, we have to understand this mission and pursue it and not pursue some subsidiary, secondary thing and make it the mission and make it the goal and measure ourselves and others by whether or not that's taking place. As I have mentioned before, many questionnaires, if you're candidating as a pastor, if

you're applying to a seminary, if you're going to fulfill any position of leadership in a church and they have some sort of interview process that seeks to establish the level of your spirituality, in my experience, there will always be these questions about, well, when's the last time you led someone to the Lord and so forth? That's not a measure.

That would be like getting ready to evaluate the men in a platoon and say, well, when's the last time one of you all encouraged some young man to go to a recruiter or some young woman? When's the last time you made sure that we're getting new Marines? It's not a primary mission. It's not the primary function. Now, if you're a recruiter, if you're in a recruiting command and that's your job and you've been detailed and given that mission, now we can look at that and now that's a valid thing because that's a part of your function, but that's not the mission of the organization.

It's just ridiculous when you think about it. So my point is we have to shake ourselves free from assumptions and the things that are taken for granted in the Christian church today. That's what Paul is trying to make happen in the Roman church.

Don't assume that the Israelites are right when they say, well, righteousness comes by the law. You've got to keep the law. Even though that's what they grew up with.

That's what they take for granted. That's their mindset. They had to shake free.

They had to decide what was important, pleasing God or pleasing themselves, pleasing God or pleasing their peers and their family and their hereditary traditional way of operating. And we have to do the same thing and it takes faith. It takes faith to operate in righteousness by faith because we have to trust that God will deal with the consequences when we are misunderstood by fellow believers, when we are misunderstood by family, when we are misjudged and maligned in some cases.

You don't have a heart for the lost. You don't have a burden. You're cold.

You're self-interested. All you care about is your own personal growth. You don't care about others.

Where's your Christ-likeness? Christ had compassion. Christ cared for others. And all you care about is getting your doctrine, getting your soul fed.

And you think once you're fed, that's all you care about. That criticism is something we may have to endure. And the reason is people who make that observation or that type of observation do not understand what we understand, that that growth and that study of the Word of God and that personal pursuit of righteousness by faith is the means by which God accomplishes things that count.

And we will find ourselves engaged in evangelism. We will find ourselves engaged in ministry. But it's going to spring from faith.

It's going to be the result of being thoroughly equipped for every good work by the Word of God. And if we go to the Word of God and think that that's the sum total of our spiritual life, well, I heard a tape or I heard a lesson or I went to Bible class, that is a pitfall. That is something that we can do.

And it's an abuse. But it doesn't mean that because it's possible to abuse that, that it's a wrong thing. Think of anything in life.

Many legitimate things can be abused. But it doesn't mean that because they have the potential for abuse, we should disregard them or run away from them. The intake of the Word of God, studying the Word of God, learning the truth that's in the Scriptures is primary.

We can't do without it. It's the voice of the Holy Spirit. It's the sword in His hand.

It's what pierces and analyzes our thoughts and intents of the heart. It's vital. The Spirit and the Word, we can't do anything without those.

That's what Jesus Christ left us when He departed this earth. I will send you the Comforter. You have my commands.

He will bring them to your mind. If you make them the object of faith, if you trust in those, if you pursue those, if you seek first the kingdom, the goal will be accomplished. And that's the message of Romans.

Now, these people who suppose that they have been shocked awake and they say, my goodness, we are in a very big boat with a lot of people surrounding us and we're headed over the waterfall of God's disapproval. And we need to change. But where does that leave Israel? Where does that leave all these people who have fought this way? And why did God put up with them for so long? And so as we come to this portion of Romans, Paul stops and spends what we now call three chapters addressing the fate of Israel.

What about Israel? Are they thrown over by God? Are they all, is God going to revoke His covenant and not fulfill His promises to Israel anymore? Have they been, if this was so wrong, why did God call them His people and deal with them for so long? And what about Israel is the question? And we might ask the question today, well, what about the church? What about all of the denominations? And what about all the people who are out there killing themselves in the energy of their own endeavors, seeking the kingdom of God? Seeking to establish their righteousness by works. What about the church down the street? What about our family members who may be engaged in very strenuous ministry and yet they don't understand what has to come first? They don't pursue their own growth in the Word of God. They don't recognize that it isn't what they do that constitutes righteousness, it's what they think.

And that you can be producing righteousness without doing a thing. In fact, that's where righteousness happens. It's before we do anything.

It's when we trust. It's when we decide. It's when we prioritize.

It's when we recognize the reality that God gives us in His Word and operate on that basis. We're already declared righteous, just like Abraham. So as we come to chapter nine, one of the things it is essential to properly understand, Romans, is that this is what we're talking about.

It's the Christian life. I ought to get a little button presidential campaign and we'll just pin it on. It's what you think.

It's what you think. One of our influential pastors has said that life is thought. You are what you think.

And it's true. We are not what we do. We're not defined by what we do.

We're not judged by what we do. What we do is generally a reflection of what we think. And God goes to the source and He judges what we think.

That's why you can look at a woman and commit a sin. Just a glance. Just a thought that we allow through the gate.

Just an idea that we toy with or that we fantasize about. The damage is done because that's where God is judging. Whether or not it eventuates in further sin by action isn't the point.

The point Jesus was making is look at the source. It's what issues forth from the inside of a man that defiles him. And that's where God also judges righteousness.

So, here we are in Romans 9. Now, any reference you look at virtually, any sermon you hear, any lessons that you pursue, studies that you go through in Romans winds up drifting back to salvation at several key points in Romans when Paul is not talking about salvation. He's not talking after eight and a half chapters about how to get saved. Eight and a half chapters of very heavy theology.

He's not going to come back and say, oh, by the way, you know, salvation from the lake of fire comes through faith. He is deep in the middle of educating us as believers on how to live. And that's essential.

It is not as though the Word of God has failed, he says in verse 6. And he says there is a pattern in the Old Testament that you can see where God upsets the expected order. God honors the younger instead of the older. God takes the last and makes them first.

God takes the foolish things of this world and confounds the wise. He uses the weak things. And

our judgment is just the reverse.

And isn't that the way it is today? Doesn't generally Christianity look at the prominent, the ones that are on TV, the ones that have published books, the ones that are out there with elbows and knees flying and says, these are the great Christians. These are the ones that God smiles upon. These are the ones that have succeeded.

It's these missionaries to slaving away. They may or may not be great heroes of the faith in God's eyes. It depends on what they think.

Why are they there? I can go sell all I own and buy a ticket to Burma and go live in a grass shack and hand out leaflets and tea necessarily about what's going on in my soul. And I may be there for all the wrong reasons. I may be there to spite someone.

I may be there because I'm competing with someone. I may be there because I think that by doing this, God certainly has to be pleased. How could God possibly look at the sacrifice that I have made and not be impressed? Look at what I have done for God.

Look at what I have given up for you. Look at how hard I'm working. Who else that I know is out here in the weeds evangelizing these godless pagan savages.

God has to be pleased. God may not be pleased at all. And how disappointed we are going to be if we fall in that category at the judgment seat of Christ.

Like he tells the Old Testament saints, there are going to be some who come, Lord, Lord, look at what I have done on your behalf. And he's going to say, I never knew you. As a nation, not individual, look at Hebrews 11 that we read for a scripture reading.

There were individuals throughout the world that were judged righteous, that were found promised. They qualify for the inheritance. There is a long list and time fails the author to list in Hebrews 11.

Many individuals, Israelites, have pleased God. They are going to be recipients of the inheritance. They are going to live in the land.

They are going to be the throne of David. They are going to have a piece of the rock. They are going to be landowners.

They are going to be rewarded. But Israel as a nation, when you look from its inception, it failed before it ever got in the wilderness. They got into the land and they failed at Ai.

They failed to drive out the enemies. They failed during the period of the judges. They failed during the reign of Saul.

They failed during the reign of David. We've seen that even with the greatest king Israel ever had

sitting on the throne, they were divided. They were, as soon as somebody blew a shofar, they would run off and rebel.

Absalom comes in and Israel goes after him and is superficial. The Absalom revolt is put down and Sheba blows the trumpet and everybody's divided and goes back to arms again. And here's King David, the greatest king Israel ever had in the Old Testament.

And they're ready to run after some rabble rouser. Under Solomon, he begins so well, he builds the temple and there's this wonderful celebration and all these great prayers and Solomon with his wisdom and he wrote the Proverbs and so forth, many of the Psalms. And yet, the kingdom degenerates under his rule and it doesn't last beyond his lifetime.

It's divided. It's torn asunder. And you have the raggedy, spotty, down-spiraling history of northern kingdom and the southern kingdom that's detailed in the Proverbs and the indictment that God puts on them require thus.

I once formulated this to put in the bulletin of the church and I'd like to just read these scriptures to you. And if you want to write these references down, I will give them at the end. But let me just read these verses.

Now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God, notice it says the Lord your God. These are believers that are being addressed. We're talking about life as a believer.

Now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? But to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways and to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. To start with the motivation on the inside of love and the desire to serve. Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

For you, O God, do not desire sacrifice or else I would give it. You do not delight in burnt offering. This is David speaking.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. These, O God, you will not despise. God says, I desire mercy and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools who do not know that they do wrong. They can be going to the house of God and offering sacrifice and they're doing wrong.

Guard your steps. He has shown you, O man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. These words were spoken in the age of the law to the Old Testament saints.

To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength and to love

your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. Jesus spoke those words in the age of Israel to Old Testament saints. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy with hope, with love, with the humble spirit that has the desire to please God.

When we start with that and cultivate that, the things that we do, the actions that we perform, the tasks that we complete, the endeavors that we fulfill day by day by day will turn out in a way that pleases God because they are sourced in the power of God and in the transforming presence of His Word and His Spirit. Those references, by the way, I'll give them to you quickly. Deuteronomy 10, verse 12, 1 Samuel 15, 22, Psalm 51, 16 and 17, Ecclesiastes 5, 1, Micah 6, 8, Mark 12, 33, and Romans 14, 17.

Again, that's Deuteronomy 10, 12, 1 Samuel 15, 22, Psalm 51, 16 and 17, Ecclesiastes 5, 1, Micah 6, 8, Mark 12, 33, and Romans 14, 17. And you can add an equal number or more to that list, but that's a representative, that's what would fit on one page of the bulletin of what God requires. These words, largely, except for the last two, were Old Testament scriptures that Israel had available.

They didn't get the message. It was clear. The Word of God was right in front of them and they missed it.

And that's the danger that we run today and that's the failure that many of us as believers commit today is with the Word of God clear in front of us. We miss our mission and we instead feel comfortable operating in the Christian environment and being judged as good people and wonderful Christians and, oh, we have a heart for the Lord, we have a burden for the lost, we're wonderful in Christian service and so forth, and we accept that judgment without going to Scripture and letting it shine its light on our soul. That's where righteousness is constituted.

So in Romans chapter 9, he talks about this and he says that the people with whom God are pleased are the ones who seek him. He talks about Moses. Moses goes and says, Lord, show me your glory.

And God tells Moses, I will have compassion on whom I have had compassion. I will have mercy on whom I have had mercy. Those who are establishing a pattern of seeking me and pursuing me, I'm going to have compassion and mercy on them.

I'm going to continue in that. That's why David, who committed so many terrible wrongs and made some colossal failures, is still a man after God's own heart. And David can stand before God and say, I am purged, I am cleansed, I stand before God in my righteousness.

We saw that over in the Psalms. And so what about these that fail? Why does God put up with that? If God is not pleased by all of this, why did God let Israel go on for so many years? Why did God let them go on? Why did he continue to call them his people and put up with them for so

many years? Why hasn't he just obliterated them and started over like he told Moses he wanted to do when they went after the golden calf? And in verse 17, he talks about the reason that God put up with Pharaoh. Why did God let Israel be in bondage to these pagan Egyptians for 400 years? And God says, for this purpose I raised you up to demonstrate my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.

The deliverance of Israel out of bondage in Egypt is one of the mightiest acts that God has ever performed. And it's a picture of the mightiest act that God has ever performed, which is our salvation. The blood of the Passover lamb representing the blood of Jesus Christ, the exodus of Israel out of bondage into blessing and freedom and opportunity in God's plan is a picture of salvation.

But what was necessary for that picture to be completed, for that history to be written? 400 years of bondage, 400 years of servitude. Think of all the generations of Israelites who trod straw into mud to make bricks, who suffered under the lash of the taskmaster, who were born, raised, and died as slaves. What was required of that Israelite to please God? They didn't have a tabernacle, they didn't have the law of Moses.

What was God looking for in those slave Israelites? Trust, belief that God would fulfill his promises. And in each of those generations there were faithful Israelites, faithful descendants of Jacob, even before the nation was constituted, who believed when they saw the bones of Jacob and said, God will deliver. Joseph believed it, I believe it.

And they died in faith, not having received the promise. They died as slaves, but they understood that this was a necessary part of God's plan. Now Paul is asking Jews in his generation to understand that the history of Israel and the failure of Israel and God's casting off of Israel seemingly is a part of his plan, that it's necessary to demonstrate his power and so that his name can be proclaimed.

We're going to pause and take our break and when we come back we're going to see exactly how Paul clinches that argument. Let's pause here and take a break.