

Missed Opportunities Romans 9:1-8

INTRODUCTION

One of the commentators I read in preparation for this sermon shared a personal experience that I have witnessed many times in my 44 years of ministry. He writes:

The exhilarating experience of the birth of my oldest child was tinged with some of the deepest sorrow I have ever known. A few weeks before my son David was born, my father died. As I held my infant son, I was overwhelmed with the thought that he would never know a paternal grandfather, and that my father would miss seeing a grandchild of his own. The height of my joy only intensified the depth of my sorrow.

I can relate to that, can you? My mom, who died when I was 20, never knew any of her grandchildren or now great-grandchildren. She did not even see her youngest two children graduate from high school. She wasn't there for any of our weddings, nor was she present the night I was ordained.

- If you have a similar experience, you know that hurts.

If you can relate to or even understand that sort of experience, you will quickly be able to relate to what the Apostle Paul is teaching in today's text.

We have just come out of one of the most exhilarating chapters in the entire Bible: Romans 8. In the last three weeks you have heard our lectors read verses like these:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God... Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:14, 17)

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. (Romans 8:26)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Romans 8:31-35)

And then last week's memory verse:

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
(Romans 8:37)

It's no wonder that several theologians over the years have called Romans the greatest book of the Bible and Romans 8 is the greatest chapter. Hearing those verses makes you feel wonderful!

But then a new chapter starts and in chapter 9 the mood changes completely.

As you read chapter 9 you can sense the heart of the Apostle Paul is breaking. Listen again to how the chapter begins (this time from The Message):

You need to know that I carry with me at all times a huge sorrow. It's an enormous pain deep within me, and I'm never free of it. I'm not exaggerating—Christ and the Holy Spirit are my witnesses. It's the (Jews) . . . If there were any way I could be cursed by the Messiah so they could be blessed by him, I'd do it in a minute. They're my family. I grew up with them. (Romans 9:1-4)

Paul was proud of his Roman citizenship, yes, but it was his Jewish heritage that he prized the most. He writes about that in Philippians 3:

(I was) ... circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. (Philippians 3:4-6)

For Paul – and for every Jew – being a Jew was a constant reminder of how God worked through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to create a people for Himself.

Theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

It was the Jews ...

- Who got to see the Shekinah glory of God.
- Who received the Law on the tablets of stone at Mt. Sinai, handwritten by the finger of God
- With whom God established special covenants
- From whom the Messiah came.

Jesus! The Messiah! He was the One everything in the Old Testament pointed toward. The laws, the covenants, the festivals and holy days – everything was designed to pave the way for Jesus. The Jews were given all of that. But they missed their opportunity.

- But instead of rejoicing about the Messiah, the Jews rejected Him.
- And that broke Paul's heart.
- Which led him to write our memory verse for today:

In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. (Romans 9:8)

From that verse we draw this foundational truth:

Salvation is possible only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther and the reformers would shorten that foundational truth to three words:

Justification by faith.

Look how Paul presents the two options:

OPTION #1: CHILDREN OF PHYSICAL DESCENT

In other words, it is not **the children by physical descent** who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. (Romans 9:8)

Right up front ... this option doesn't work.

But many of the Jews in Paul's day (and also today) were counting on the fact that they had a free pass to heaven because they had within them the blood of Abraham.

We are the chosen people!

But Paul reminds them:

- Abraham had two sons: Isaac and Ishmael. Both carried his bloodline. But the descendants of Ishmael were never considered to be the favored people of God. Only Isaac was.
- In fact, Isaac had two sons, but the Esau side of the family was left out too.
- All throughout the history of the Jews God rejected people who had the blood of Abraham and focused on a faithful remnant of people.
 - These people had the bloodline, yes, but they also had faith.
 - Hebrews 11 – the Faith Hall of Fame – celebrates these people – not because of who their granddaddy was, but because of the faith they placed in Jesus.

In essence, this passage teaches us that if you rely on anything other than faith in Jesus, you have missed your opportunity for salvation. It is a problem that continues to this very day, for both Jew and Gentile.

- Some people today rely on the fact that Grandma was a great Christian woman, but Grandma's faith was good for Grandma alone.
- My father was a pastor. My great-grandfather was a pastor. That's looks noble on the family tree, but it does nothing for me.

- Nor can I rely on the good deeds I do. Altruism might earn me a community service award, but only faith in Jesus earns you a home in heaven.

So being a child of Abraham doesn't make you a child of God, anymore than being the child of a pastor gives you special credit.

Paul knew countless people who were missing out. And it broke his heart. In fact, he was writing this letter to a group of people who needed to hear that message themselves. So he points them to the second option:

OPTION #2: CHILDREN OF THE PROMISE

In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is **the children of the promise** who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. (Romans 9:8)

And this is good news for you and me. Because if Jewish blood were required for salvation, you and I would be the ones who missed out. And what is the promise? The faith of Abraham, not the blood.

Read Hebrews 11.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. (Hebrews 11:8-12)

If you want to inherit anything from your Christian ancestors, choose their faith not their genetic code.

- Don't rely on Grandma's prayers for you. Learn to pray like Grandma did.
- Don't rely on whether your pastor knows the Bible. Learn the Bible.
- Develop faith in your own life. Become a child of the promise.

APPLICATION

Leith Anderson is a now-retired pastor, and former president of the National Association of Evangelicals ... which is where I met him. He shares an experience of a missed opportunity in his own life. He writes:

As a boy, I grew up outside of New York City and was an avid fan of the old Brooklyn Dodgers. One day my father took me to my first baseball game. It was a World Series game between the Dodgers and the Yankees. I was so excited, and I just knew the Dodgers would trounce the Yankees. Unfortunately, the Dodgers lost the game. They never even got on base. My excitement was shattered.

Years later I was engrossed in a conversation with a man who was a walking sports almanac. I told him about the first major league game I attended and added, "It was such a disappointment. I was a Dodger fan' and the Dodgers never got on base."

The man said, "Wait ... You were There? You were at the game when Don Larsen pitched the first perfect game in all of World Series history?"

I replied, "Yeah, but uh, we lost." It was then that I realized that I had been so caught up in my team's defeat that I missed out on the fact that I was a witness to a far greater page of history.

In this text Paul reminds us not to miss our opportunity to experience all that God has for His children because you are relying on something other faith.

In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. (Romans 9:8)

From that verse we draw this foundational truth:

Salvation is possible only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Amen