

## A Land of Dry Bones

Romans 9:14-33

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Ezekiel 37:15-28

Responsive Psalm 71:1-8

Last week we spent a decent amount of time going through and simply pointing out that throughout all of scripture there is this theme of the election that Paul is spending so much time writing about here. This section here is not a side track, or rabbit trail as some may believe but is rather Paul teaching the logical conclusion of everything he has written thus far. Simply put, only those who are of the spirit have faith, and that faith is a gift given by God, enabling those whom he wills to believe. In the first half of chapter 9 here to argue this point he uses Abraham's children as an example, for God chose for his own glory, that he would go against the traditions of man and it would be the younger who would be through whom would come the inheritance, and the promised Messiah. Verse 11, “for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or any evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls,, it was said to Sarah, “the older shall serve the younger.”

Again pointing to this reality that it is not about being the physical descendants of Abraham, but instead is all about the promises of God. Israel rested upon their lineage, their physical connection to Abraham as a special people that God has set apart. And yes, if we read through the old testament we find that is true, God chose Israel and set them apart from all of the other nations for it was through Abraham that the Messiah would come, the promised seed in whom all the nations shall be blessed. But instead of looking ahead to the promise, they looked back to Abraham and Moses. I heard a sermon preached years ago that made this same error, teaching on the law and the Christians walk today, he had said that “now that you have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, you have been made able to fulfill the law, we go back to Moses to find our rule and guide in life.” Again this is the same mistake that Israel was making, looking back and finding righteousness in the past, when it has already been complete and fulfilled in Christ.

Years ago Josh preached a message on the account commonly referred to as the transfiguration. And it has stuck with me through all these years, the point was that God was showing his disciples the centrality of Christ. Let us go read the account real quick, its only a few verses in Matthew chapter 17, starting in verse 1. “ Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him. Then Peter answered and said “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, let us make three tabernacles; one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. While he was still speaking behold a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched the and said, Arise, and do not be afraid. When they ha lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.”

The point isn't to look back to Moses, or Elijah, or Abraham but to look to Christ the one whom all of these who came before spoke of and were looking forward to. Those who have come before have served their purpose, but now that Christ has come, he is the fulfillment, the totality of all that came before, for it all pointed to him. Paul laments the blindness of Israel, their stubborn adherence to the things which were shadows, the things which pointed to Christ who is the promised seed of Abraham, and who has fulfilled all of these things, yet they rejected him. So he concludes, that "that they are not all Israel who are Israel." Even God's electing of the Nation of Israel as his special people was not a promise of eternal salvation, but rather a promise in which the one who would offer that salvation would come, and that he would keep them and provide for them because of that promise. They have indeed been separated as a special people for the purpose and will of God, a people through whom the Messiah came, and by whom was put to death fulfilling the righteous requirements of the forgiveness of sin for all who will believe. Even the nation of Israel stands as an example of God's elected people, a shadow of something greater. In Abraham God called a nation of particular people, but in Christ God called a nation of priests from all people. Heritage and lineage means nothing in this nation of priests, God has chosen for himself a people from every nation, tongue, and tribe.

Since Paul has concluded these things, that God in his sovereign purpose and will has chosen for himself a people, and that people are not the physical descendants of Abraham, and that mankind is powerless in this spirit led transition into faith he spends the last half of this chapter answering those who would claim that this concept of God's election is unfair if mankind isn't truly given a choice in the matter. So let us go ahead and read our passage for this morning, we are going to go ahead and read through the end of the chapter, starting in verse 14. ( READ 9:14-33) So Paul had just given the example of Jacob the younger offspring of Abraham being chosen to get the birthright, and through whom the promises of God to bring forth a Messiah would come, a right that is normally reserved for the first born, and quoting the account from scripture he reminds his readers what God had said, verse 12 "It was said to Sarah, the older shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." It would seem that not much has changed from the time that Paul wrote this to today, for the argument which he refutes is the same that we hear today, if everyone isn't given an equal chance then God isn't fair. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?

I think not understanding the purpose and necessity of God's election in the salvation of his people comes from 2 major misunderstandings. The first misunderstanding is simply of the sovereign nature of God, of his immense power. Since our lives are so defined by what we can taste, touch, see, hear and smell, the things in which we can't experience in such a way becomes harder for us to comprehend and understand. God is infinitely more powerful, and infinitely more sovereign than we can even imagine, not only is each person in this world, throughout all of time exactly where God has ordained that they should be, each molecule is exactly where God has ordained it should be. There is truly nothing that happens outside of his purpose and plan, God is not surprised by mankind, or anything in this world that he created. He is not a God who has merely set the world in motion and is now sitting back to see how it all pans out, he is completely and totally involved with each and every thing. If he weren't, he would not be a God worth worshiping, he would not be a God worth praying to. God has chosen to show us his purpose and his will through prayer, when we make known our desires, and our needs to him of which he is already well aware, through the answering of such he shows his love, and his mercy. Why would we pray to God if we did not believe in his power to change the hearts and minds of people. Why would we pray to God for healing, if we did not believe that he had power over the body, and is able to mend and heal. Why would we pray to God for the souls of our loved ones if he did not have the power to save them?

We humans can be schizophrenic in our thinking at times, believing that God can do these things, that he is sovereign over all, asking for healing, for provision, for safety, security, for blessings, guidance, peace, believing that he can accomplish, and will accomplish all of these things, but when it comes to salvation many lose sight of God's sovereignty, they believe in his power and control for all things except for when it comes to our ability to choose him. Paul is arguing, that God is sovereign over that as well, and he is just, and he is holy, and he is righteous in doing so. A God who is not sovereign in all, is not a God of anything. He either is sovereign over all, or he isn't God. If the God you are serving is not this God who by his sovereign grace and mercy chooses who he wills, then you are serving a God of your own creation who is not a God at all. In no way, or in any circumstance will mankind's choices, or decisions trump the purpose and will of God. We can not limit God's sovereignty to only the things that we want or think that he should be sovereign over.

The second major misunderstanding in all of this, is the simple fact of our natural state before God. Just as God is infinitely more powerful than we can imagine, our sinful nature is infinitely more dire than we think. Mankind has deluded themselves to believing that they are overall decent good people. And often times, if you were to compare with humanity, many are decent good people, there is no doubt. But before a just and holy God, we are intrinsically stained by a darkness and rebellion against him that is unavoidable. That sinful nature that we are born into is what separates us from God. Throughout the bible we see the terminology of being dead in sins, that is the state we are born into, spiritually dead, blind and deaf to the things of God. Because of Adam's disobedience all of mankind has been put under a curse to be subject and controlled by sinful desires. God had told Adam, in the day that you eat of the fruit of the tree of which I forbid, you shall surely die. He was not speaking merely a physical death, but a spiritual death, a separation from God. And that was his promise to Abraham, that he would make for himself a people, a nation of believers out of the mass of fallen humanity. As Paul says, from one lump he made some vessel for honor, and some for dishonor. That one lump was already corrupted, and cursed...the controversy shouldn't be that he made some for dishonor, but rather that out of that one lump of corrupt sinful humanity he made some for honor.

And he does all of this for his purpose and glory. There is none who can answer against him, for all things are his, all things have been created by him, and all things have been created for him to do with as he wills for his own good pleasure and purpose. So when God allows for evil rulers to rise over his people, he does so for his purpose. As Paul writes in verse 17 "For the scripture says to Pharaoh, For this very 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." Some may look at this statement and declare that it is unfair, that God had not given Pharaoh a chance because he was preordained for his purpose. But those who would argue such aren't understanding that Pharaoh, just like Israel who God chose to free, were made from one lump, corrupted, and sinful. Pharaoh is not further condemned, he was condemned already and God chose to not show grace and mercy so that his power may be shown and his grace and mercy may be showered upon his chosen. Verse 22, "What if God, wanting to show his wrath and to make his purpose known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that he might make known the richest of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had prepared beforehand for glory."

Without the electing grace of God, we would all still be lost in our sins, separated from God, destined for hell, but God in his mercy has chosen some out of the mass of fallen humanity to be his people, a nation of pilgrims and sojourners, strangers in the world that they live in, traveling toward the land of promise which will one day be given. God gives a great example of this reality, the breath of life given to the dead soul causes it to rise up in worship of him. We read it this morning in Ezekiel. The valley of dry bones, and by the word of God, through his messenger Ezekiel, the dead we raised and made alive. So to it is with the new birth, mankind is dead in their sins, dry bones laying on the ground with no hope of life in them, but then the word of God comes and raises them up, giving them the breath of a new life in him. This is the gospel going out to a fallen world, we can preach to everyone that we see, everyone that we ever meet but unless God's breath of life is breathed upon them, they will never rise alive, it is God who has the power to bring back the dead, and we the gospel ministers are merely the vessel he has chosen to preach the message he has given so those whom he enables, may here and believe. The God goes on and describes to Ezekiel what his people whom he has raised shall be like, reading this as we know, that not all are Israel who are Israel he says, in verse 21 of Ezekiel 34, "Thus says the Lord God, Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and I Will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land."

There is a prophesy for the physical nation, but there is also the prophesy for the spiritual nation here as well. God took Israel out of captivity and gave them their land, but he also has taken spiritual Israel from every nation, out of captivity of sin and will give them a holy land to live in with him. Look at verse 22, "And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel, and one king shall rule over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into 2 kingdoms again." There is the physical, and spiritual fulfillment of this prophesy, there is no one king over spiritual Israel, no longer divided between Jew and Gentile but all have been made one to rule and reign with him, and you shall know them, that they are my people, for verse 23, "they shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from their dwelling place in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people, and I shall be their God."

God works in us, and through us as his people to put away the sinful things, he has forgiven and forgotten our trespass, our rebellion against him and has made us now not only a nation, but his children, the offspring of Abraham, through the promised seed, who is Christ. He has delivered us up from our dwelling place of sin, cleansed us and made us his people. And now, has made a covenant of peace with us, through the blood of Christ. His tabernacle who lives within us. Verse 26 of Ezekiel, "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them, I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set my sanctuary in their midst forever more. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God and they will be my people. The nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel when my sanctuary is in their midst forever more. If it were not for God and his mercy, all of mankind would be destined for hell, but by his grace he has saved a remnant, and set apart for himself a people, and he lives with them and is among them, keeping, guarding, protecting and setting them aside so the world may know that we are his."

The world is fallen in sin, rebelled against God, lost and dead, separated in sin, but God has called his people out of this lump of lost humanity as Paul writes, quoting Hosea in verse 25, "I will call them my people, who were not my people, and her beloved who was not beloved." This is God's grace and mercy to call forth and make for himself a people that were not his people, and to love us who did not love him. He has taken the lost, broken, sinful people and have made us his. And we who are his, for whom he has died and are raised up in him in a new life, are all like Ezekiel, sharing this word of life to the valley of dry bones, so that those of whom God has chosen may be made alive in him. The call has gone out, repent, believe, turn from your sin and rebellion and rest in the everlasting arms of the gracious and merciful creator, As it says in the book of Hebrews, "Every house is built by someone, but he who built all things is God. Moses was indeed faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken of afterward, but Christ as a Son over his own house, whose house we are if we hold fast to the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness." Instead hear the call, repent and believe. Do not wait until tomorrow, all that we have is today. Consider Christ, the one who died for the sins of his people so that they may be brought into the household of God, rest on him, believe in him, worship him for it is only through him that we have been made vessels of honor to the glory of the father in whom is all things.