

ROMANS, WE HAVE A PROBLEM
Romans 9

In 1971 there was a defining moment for the NASA and the space program of the United States. There was a short circuit (and about a dozen other things) that short circuited the success and shortened the mission of the Apollo 13.

A switch was flipped, some fluid stirred, a tank exploded, and a panel was torn off of the capsule, causing the Apollo 13 to abort its mission to the moon.

Commander James Lovell of the Apollo 13 when reporting the explosion to NASA said, "Houston, we have a problem."

We come to chapter nine in our study of Romans. In some sense Paul might have said to the church he was writing in Rome, "Romans, we have a problem."

For the commander, crew, Apollo capsule, mission control, and a concerned country it was a shaky and rough ride back home.

It think it'll be a shaky and rough ride for us through Chapter nine. The mission is to get you home and land you in front of Romans 10 for next week.

In our Romans series we started over two months ago with this statement of faith, Romans 1.16-17, **"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation (wholeness, deliverance) of everyone who believes...**

For in the gospel (which means good news) a righteousness (being made right) from God is revealed, a righteousness (right living) that is by faith from first to last , just as it is written, 'the righteous (those that live right with God) will live by faith.

The first five chapters of Romans basically focused on how to be saved and chapters 6-8, basically focused on how to live a life of faith after we're saved.

As we ended chapter eight last week I could just imagine the joy in Paul's voice, and I could just picture him jumping up and down for joy, shouting and screaming, claiming that we're conquers, celebrating and claiming victory over anything and everything that Satan, the world, and the flesh could possibly throw at us, "NO CONDEMNATION! There is NO CONDEMNATION in Christ Jesus!!!" "NO SEPERATION! There is Nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus!!!"

I would have thought Paul would fly that wave of momentum right into the 12th chapter. asking believers to make a deeper level of commitment to God, Romans 12.1-2, **"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."**

He didn't. He's got to go with plan B. The Jews not accepting Jesus had short circuited the success of the Gospel. So Paul, with adrenalin pumping and flying high, abruptly stops the victory song and basically says, "Romans, we have a problem."

Not willing to abort his investment in them and their mission he writes, Romans 9.1-2, **I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying,**

**my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—
I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.**

He is devastated because the Jews are rejecting Jesus.
Look at the words, great sorrow and unceasing anguish.
He is not a passive observer, he is taking this personal.

Now don't miss the paradox of this-Paul, who spoke more about being "in Christ" than anyone else;
Paul who had this wonderful, personal and powerful, loving relationship with Jesus
was willing to be separated from Jesus for the sake of others,
v 3, "**For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers...
those of my own race, ⁴ the people of Israel."**

The words cursed and cut off combine to mean, "condemned to total and utter destruction."
In other words it hurt him more to know his friends were without God
than for himself to end up separated from God.
It's hard to believe he cared that much, but that is a true pastor's heart.

Ray Stedman tells the story of a man who said to his friend,
"I heard you dismissed your Pastor, why?"
Friend, "Because he told us if we don't repent, we're going to hell."
Man, "What does your new Pastor say?"
Friend, "He says if we don't repent, we're going to hell too."
Man, "So what is the difference?"
Friend, "When the first pastor said it, he sounded glad about it."

Paul wasn't glad about it. Paul's heart was broken heart.
In part, the Jews rejected the message because they rejected the messenger.

You see Paul was the head of the Jewish Gestapo which persecuted the Christians.
Then he became one.
Talk about a what might be perceived as a flip flop politician.

Some of the Jews couldn't trust him and others saw him as a traitor.
You see he set up churches and taught the Gentiles(non-Jewish people)
didn't have to be obedient to law of Moses.

So, Romans, we have another problem.
With the rejection of Jesus by many Jews comes another complication.
If the Jews don't get it, then it appears as if God,
who chose them, was not keeping his promises to them.

Think about the implications of that.
If this all wonderful, powerful, protective, and provisional God
doesn't keep his promise to Israel despite the fact that they are rebellious, disobedient, unlovable,
and can't keep their part of the bargain,
then the question has to be asked,
will God keep his promise to the church when she is rebellious, disobedient, and unlovable?

And if God doesn't keep his promise to Israel or the church
then can we count on him to keep his promises to us when we're rebellious, disobedient, and unlovable?

It's important to keep promises, isn't it?

It is good for one's emotional health and fosters trust in relationships.
 In our day and age trust is at an all time low.
 It is hard to trust people and it is hard to trust institutions of school, family, government and church.
 But first and foremost, we're called to trust, to have faith that God will do what God says god will do.

Here is a refreshing story of a promise kept.
 Robertson McQuilkin was a very successful president of Colombia International University.
 His wife Murial had Alzheimer's and he quit his job to stay home and take care of her.
 Many people were disappointed in his decision,
 thinking he could do more good for people if he continued as the president.

They tried to point out to him that she could not accept nor respond to his love
 and wouldn't know whether or not he was even there.

His response to their pleas were, "I made her a promise."
 They countered, " but she wouldn't know."
 He said, "But I would."

In Chapters 9-11 Paul uses Israel's history and sacred writings as evidence to show that God keeps his promises,
 that he is sovereign, and that his plan for the Jews is consistent with his character.

Listen to this litany of what God has already provided for them, verses 4-5,
**"Theirs is the adoption as sons; 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 Christ,
 who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."**

And yet in spite of all these blessings, Israel has failed.
 Is Israel's failure to recognize and receive Christ God's failure?
 In verse six, Paul says no, **"It is not as though God's word had failed."**

Think about it-when children fail-is that failure always the parents responsibility?
 Sometimes it is but not always.

And when children fail do you forsake them?
 Do you love them any less?
 Do you care about them any less?
 I'll bet you do want their attitudes and actions to change.

Paul speaks to two attitudes, two beliefs that the Jews need adjust;
 one was thinking that all who are of Jewish heritage, the bloodline of Abraham are saved.
 verse 7, **"In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children,
 but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."**

Let me put it this way.
 We see this in all ages-some of us tend to just accept what our parents believe
 and we go to the church where our parents go to church.

Our faith isn't about being Methodist, Lutheran, or belong to this or that church.
 Even being a member of First United Methodist Church.

Now that's not all bad but when it comes to experiencing and expressing the faith-
 at some point, we need to know what we believe and why,

we need take some responsibility for that relationship ourselves,
for what we believe and how we behave.
That in part is why people read the Bible, listen to sermons, join bible Studies, or are part of Confirmation.

The other issue of misunderstanding was
that the Jews thought they're saved by obedience to the law.

Actually we struggle with that too, don't we?
We often think that if we don't do bad things and do enough good things,
That's enough, we'll be ok with God.

Well what about Romans 6.23, "The wages of sin is death."
We've all earned death, we all deserve death.

We need to remember the words of Ephesians 2.8-10,
"we're saved by grace through faith, should anyone boast...
and we are God's workmanship created to do good works that God has prepared for us to do..."

One person has said it this way;
we need to be impressed with how great God is and not try to impress God with how good we are.

Let's listen to Paul as he reminds the Romans of God's election of Israel,
of the stories of Moses and Pharaoh, and of the relationship between a potter and the clay.

First, God's choice is one of a nation,
and it doesn't depend upon Israel's faithfulness, works, or goodness; verse 11-13,
**Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—
in order that God's purpose in election might stand:
not by works but by him who calls—she was told,
"The older will serve the younger."
Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."**

Pretty powerful word, hate.
"But Esau I hated..." simply means
God says I didn't choose Esau's people as a nation to reveal to the world who I am.
I chose Jacob or Israel's people to do that.

Now Paul anticipates the complaint, that is unfair, verse 14-15,
**"What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all!
For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."**

Paul adds in verses 16,
"It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

Think about Israel. How could have Israel survived all these years?
It is amazing that Israel exists today.
That in itself is a wonderful example of God keeping his promise.

How would they have ever survived considering the overwhelming odds in such a hostile environment,
Israel has been persecuted and throughout history there have been many attempts to wipe her off of the map,
Jerusalem herself has been conquered 27 times.

The birth, the history, God's discipline, the giftedness of the people;

their restart, restoration, return to the land in 1948,
their very survival and success today is truly a miracle, a God miracle.

Now Paul is pretty sharp. He anticipates another complaint, verses 19-21,
“One of you will say to me: “Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?”
In other words since God is so powerful and in control, how can we be responsible?

But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?
“Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’”
Does not the potter have the right to make out
of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?”

Paul’s not very pastoral here, he says, that’s just the way it is,
it’s God’s call, it is about God’s sovereignty.
But that still doesn’t excuse anyone from personal responsibility.

How many of you have played with play dough?
Have you ever made people?
Sure, you can do with them what you like, but play dough people don’t have
have feelings, emotions, and a free will-neither does a pot-people do.

Paul contrasts the lives of Moses and Pharaoh to illustrate that.
The scriptures tell us Pharaoh’s heart was hardened,
but Pharaoh had plenty of opportunities to say yes to God
plenty of opportunities to repent, and do what God asked, but he didn’t.
The same sunlight that melts ice, hardens clay.

Consider verse 22 and following,
“What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known,
bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction?

Patience is a great attribute of God but **prepared** is the operative word here.
It is not suggesting that God actually shaped Pharaoh an object of his wrath
but that Pharaoh made himself , fitted himself, ready for wrath
and then God chose him and used him to be an object wrath.

Just as God chose to use Pharaoh, he chooses others to be objects of mercy.

What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy,
whom he prepared in advance for glory— even us, whom he also called,
not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?”

That’s a good place to land, in the arms of Jesus, as objects of his mercy, prepared for his glory.
Let’s stand and sing, Standing on the Promises.