

Text: Romans 9:1-8, 30-33 *I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the father and from whom according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.*

But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: "Behold I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; Save me, and I shall be saved, for You are my praise. Amen. (Jer 17:14)

Theme: THE ONLY HERITAGE THAT MATTERS

- Not of the flesh
- Of the promise

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ, who are the true Israel through faith in the promises of God -

I am 3/4 German and 1/4 Norwegian. My father was a Lutheran pastor as were both of my Grandfathers. I have great-grandfathers who were farmers and others who were Lutheran ministers. What about you? What is your heritage? I understand that this week the "Today Show" will be running a feature called "Roots" where the four anchors will trace their heritage to find out more about their ancestors, where they came from, and what they went through. I imagine as they study their family history they will find stories they are proud of, stories they are ashamed of, and stories that make them sad.

Heritage - where our families came from and what they went through - is important to many people. It seems as we get older it becomes more important. In Jesus' day, the Jews prided themselves on their heritage. Just consider the number of times in the Gospels that we find the Jews proclaiming that they were decedents of Abraham or that they follow Moses. This was a matter of pride for them. Many Jews viewed themselves as being closer to God simply because they were the physical decedents of Abraham.

Yet as we come to the 9th chapter of Romans, we find the Apostle Paul clearly stating that being the physical descendants of Abraham is not what is important when it comes to God. John the Baptist told the proud Jews, "**Do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'** For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones." (Mt 3:9) Rather what is important is the heritage of faith. Faith based on the promises of God.

Let us therefore consider, “THE ONLY HERITAGE THAT MATTERS.” May God guide us and strengthen us through by His holy Word. Amen.

NOT OF THE FLESH

Last Sunday in our study of Romans we heard those amazingly uplifting words of Romans 8. Paul joyfully proclaimed that there is NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus; that ALL things work together for good to those who love God to those who are the called according to His purpose; and that NOTHING can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul then goes to begin chapter 9 by speaking of the “*great sorrow and continual grief*” in his heart.

What is it that would cause Paul to speak of such immeasurable joy in the close of chapter 8 to such immeasurable grief in chapter 9? It is how he feels as he considers the spiritual condition of his fellow Israelites according to the flesh. So great is Paul’s sorrow over his fellow Jews that he says in verse three, “*For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*” Paul realizes that even if he were accursed from Christ that still would be of no help to his fellow Jews. In Psalm 49 the psalmist declares that no man *can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him, For the redemption of their souls is costly.* (Ps 49:7-8a) For this reason Paul only speaks that he could wish that he was able to do that to save his kinsmen - his fellow Jews.

Why is Paul so grieved over his fellow Israelites? He would have us consider all of the spiritual advantages they were given and threw away. Paul basically traces the history of the Old Testament Children of Israel. He begins by saying, “*To whom pertain the adoption.*” Out of all the nations in the world, God chose the descendants of Abraham to have His only begotten Son born of. No other nation, but the Children of Israel were given this honor of being called by God, “My People.”

“*The glory.*” To the Children of Israel and no other nation was the glory of the one true God revealed. His glory went before them as they journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land. His glory descended on Mt Sinai and at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem.

“*The covenants.*” It was from Abraham and his descendants that the LORD God promised the Savior would come. It was to David that the LORD God promised that the King of kings would come from. It was to the Children of Israel that the Triune God said, “*I will be your God and you will be My people.*”

“*The giving of the law.*” To whom did the LORD originally give the Ten Commandments? While the law is written in the heart of every man, the LORD only spelled it out to the Children of Israel.

“*The service of God, and the promises.*” Unlike the many false gods of the world, the LORD God had given specific directions about how He was to be worshiped. These services were a constant reminder of sin and a constant pointing ahead to the future. To a coming Savior who would be sacrificed for sin. These are among the many spiritual blessings that only the Children of Israel had as a part of their heritage.

But the unique blessings don’t end there. Paul then adds - “*of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.*” They too had the patriarchs of the faith. But more than that the Son of God chose to took on flesh in the womb of one of their Jewish relatives - the virgin Mary. What other nation on earth could claim to have “Immanuel - God with us”?

Though God had given them all these spiritual advantages, though they had this rich heritage, they stumbled over the Stone which the LORD had laid in Zion. This Stone is Jesus Christ on whom salvation is built. But this Stone was a rock of offense to so many of the Jews. They did not want a Messiah who would build their eternal salvation for them, they wished to build it for themselves - by their own works. And so when Christ came, they, in effect, threw out all those spiritual advantages which God had given them. Though they had many advantages according to the flesh - theirs was a wasted, worthless heritage because it was not mixed with faith.

OF THE PROMISES

So what happened? God gave all these advantages to the Children of Israel - yet they threw them away. Paul dismisses the notion outright that it was the fault of the Word of God. Verse 6 - ***“But it is not that the word of God had taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called.’ That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.”***

To help us understand the only heritage that matters, Paul takes us back to the account of Abraham and his sons. The LORD had promised Abraham a son, even in his old age. Abraham’s wife, the 90 year-old Sarah, thought the only way to accomplish this was through her maid-servant Hagar. So Abraham had a son with Hagar named Ishmael. Ishmael was Abraham’s son according to the flesh, but this was not the son which God had promised. God went against nature and gave Abraham a son through his aged wife, Sarah. Isaac was the son of the promise - contrary to the flesh, to everything natural. Isaac, not Ishmael, was the one through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed. Isaac, the son of the promise, not Ishmael - the son according to the flesh, was the one through whom kings would come and eventually the promised Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

Those who are the true descendants of Abraham, the true Israelites are not the natural descendants - the descendants according to the flesh. Rather the true Israel is the children of the promise. Those who are born of the Spirit of God working through the Word. Jesus speaks of this in John 3:5 when He says, ***“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”*** It is those who by the Spirit of God, believe and trust the promises of God - THEY are the true Israel. They are the true descendants of Abraham and Isaac. They are the children of God.

While there were some Jews who believed on Jesus for salvation, by in large Christ and the Gospel was rejected by the Jews - as it continues to be today. When the Jews rejected Christ and the message of the Gospel, where did the Apostles go? They went to the Gentiles - those who were not natural descendants of Abraham. Those who were not naturally related to Jesus, according to the flesh. Those who did not have all those spiritual advantages that the Jews had. Those who had practiced open idolatry like the Corinthians and Athenians. Those who did not pursue the law as the Jews had done. And what did the Gentiles find in Christ? Paul writes in verse 30, the ***“Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith.”*** Those who were outside the covenant, outside of the promises, and the temple worship - those Gentiles who believed on Christ found what the Jews could not gain for themselves - righteousness. In Christ they found the cornerstone on which they could build and ***“not be put to shame.”*** They would not be let down in the salvation that Christ brings.

So, where does this leave us? What lesson is there for us in this text? While we are not Jews there is a lesson about spiritual heritage here for us. As Lutherans, one could say that we have a rich spiritual history. We claim to be members of a “conservative, orthodox, Lutheran church.” Some of us may even look at that as a title to boast about. But if we simply cling to the name and title alone, it is worthless - like “Israel” or “descendants of Abraham.” On Judgment Day Christ is not going to say, “All Conservative Lutherans may now come forward.”

Rather what is the important heritage? One which clings to a name or one which clings to the promises of God? History bears out for us that the CLC will not exist forever, nor will it remain orthodox forever. This congregation may not even endure until Christ’s return. So we must not build our hopes on being “Lutheran” nor on our Synod nor on our association with this congregation. Instead what does Paul say in the closing words of our text? ***“Whoever believes on Him (that is Christ) will not be put to shame.”***

Lutheranism, the CLC, and Prince of Peace have blessed heritage, but only insofar as it builds on Christ and the righteousness that is of faith. If it is not build on Christ than we have not attained righteousness and we are lost. But build on Christ Jesus and Him crucified we have nothing to fear - for ***“there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”*** (Rom 8:1) In Christ we have the only heritage that matters. May God preserve us in this heritage until the end. Amen.