

The View from 30,000 feet

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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You know, if you think about what we've just declared, the tomb was sealed, three days later it was found unsealed and empty, resurrection had taken place, then we also spoke of the fact there's a day coming where he shall return. You know, we're really good at looking back, we're good at looking back and seeing that the tomb was sealed, we're great at looking back particularly this season of the year as we celebrate the resurrection that took place three days later, but we have a hard time looking forward and we have a hard time, that verse about the fact that he shall return one day. In fact, in 2 Peter 3 it says there will be a day, and I think we can say we live in this day, where people will mock us and say, "Why do you say that? It's been so long." And yet it's that same chapter of the Bible that I'm sure we're familiar with, it says a day with the Lord as if a thousand years and a thousand years is if a day. You know, when you think about it, from God's perspective we haven't even gotten through the weekend yet and so today as we approach, as we study the word of God, it is my prayer even as we sing those words that we wouldn't see it from our perspective, we would see it from his because when we see it from ours, we always lose it in the weeds every time.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we prepare our hearts today not just in song but in this time, as we prepare to read and to study, Lord, and to be impacted by your word, that is my prayer today that these would not be suggestions or ideas of ancient days but the living breathing communication from you to us this hour, this moment for our lives. Lord, we're grateful that you inspired it, we're humbled that you preserved it. Lord, we pray now as we study it that we would be changed, we would be transformed as it impacts us. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Romans 9. As you're turning to Romans 9, if you're a guest or visitor with us, allow me to give you a little bit of insight of kind of where we are as far as our message series. We as a family of faith are very systematically and shall I say somewhat slowly walking through the Scriptures generally speaking about a chapter or maybe two chapters a day. It's about a three year process where we're encouraging each and every one who comes into contact with us just to read the same Scripture each and every day. Sometimes we'll read two

chapters a day, sometimes one chapter a day, but for those of you who participated this week, this was a different week. In fact, as you look back in this section of the book of Romans, rather than a chapter or two, there were some days we only read half a chapter or just a few verses because you and I had the privilege this week of reading through a section of Scripture as we'll see in just a moment, that is steeped so much in what we might call just the infiniteness and limitless of who God is. In fact, we're going to discuss today this plan, this provision that he's had for all of eternity to extend his grace and his mercy to those who would have faith and belief.

So this is one of those weeks where we kind of need to spend a little time kind of letting it soak in a little bit more. The other thing is there are so many references to the Old Testament in these sections of the Scriptures. In fact, let me encourage you, we're going to be in Isaiah 42 in just a few moments and if you're one of those who likes to either turn to or flip the page or have a marker on your electronic device, we are going to be in Isaiah 42 but just as a little bit of a precursor today, the message today is going to feel a little more teachy than it does preachy, if that makes sense. In fact, as we go back to the book of Isaiah, we're going to discover that this section of Scripture is just rooted in some incredible Old Testament teachings and I think we need to all come to an agreement, if there's a part of the Bible that we oftentimes as New Testament born again believers struggle with, it is the Old Testament. We love spending time in the Gospel, we love the letters of Paul. In fact, there are some of us who even cherish what we know as that apocalyptic end of the Bible known as the book of Revelation, but we get bogged down in the Old Testament at times whether it be the minor prophets, the law, whatever it may be and so today we're going to see that the message that is preserved for us in the book of Romans isn't isolated in time but an extension of the plan of God for millennia.

So today as we turn to Romans 11, we're just going to read the first seven verses of this incredible chapter of Scripture and then discuss what I call some very strategic aspects of it. It says,

1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Do you know not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, 3 Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. 4 But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. 5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 6 And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. 7 What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded

Now when you come to this passage of Scripture, in fact as we're going to see in just a moment a section of Scripture that extends all the way back to what we know as chapter

9, today I want to fly over these passages at 30,000 feet. I'm sure many if not most or all of us are familiar with that perspective of being in an airplane, particularly on a very clear day. No matter where you fly out of or no matter where you start, once you get in the air, everything looks different. You're not confined just to the locale of which you departed, you're not confined even to the region of which you may be from, for once you get at 30,000, once you get at cruising altitude, you're able to see at such an extensive expanse of that which is behind and that which lies ahead, that which is on this side and that which is on that side. So as we read these verses, as we read this section of Scripture, it is so easy to get caught up in the weeds and to see things but I want to kind of take liftoff today, go at 30,000 feet and kind of see what does this passage have and how does it impact us today.

The first aspect that is, I think we need to see the position that this passage has in what we know as the book of Romans. If you've been reading along with us, the book of Romans probably the most beloved book of what we know as the New Testament maybe outside of the Gospel of John, and I believe so for a multitude of reasons, one of which is this: it is the book of Romans which declares so emphatically the goodness and the greatness and the grandeur of who God is and at the same time it reveals to us the depth of the depravity of our sinfulness, and yet it is the book of Romans that marries these concepts where we see redemption, we see reconciliation, we see forgiveness and justification take place as he who was holy and without sin was willing to become sin on our behalf so that we could be declared righteous even though we have nothing to offer or we do not deserve it.

So it is in the context of the book of Romans but if you lift off to about 30,000 feet, this passage is in a unique position for as you begin the book of Romans, chapter 1 makes it pretty clear that the Gentiles are in sin, chapter 2 makes it even clearer that the Jewish people are in sin. By the time you get to chapter 3, it says all people are in sin just in case you don't classify yourself as one of those two people groups. We all have this sin problem in our lives. By the time you get to chapter 5, it says, "But God commended his love toward us while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." There is this beautiful story that is laid out of his willingness to give up himself for our forgiveness of sins. By the time you get to chapter 8, one of the great chapters in Scripture, it says in verse 1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." It talks about that we're the sons of God, we've been adopted in his family, we are joint heirs with him, and the conclusion of chapter 8, by the way, just one of the greatest singularities of Scripture, it says there is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ Jesus. There is no height. There is no depth. There is no principality. There is nothing in this life or even in the supernatural world that can separate us from his love.

Then you get to chapter 9, and something unique takes place. The Apostle Paul almost pulls the emergency brake and says, "Do you know what? If it were possible, I would like to give up my own standing with God so that the Israelites could be saved," those that have the oracles of God for thousands of years, and he begins this discourse on the Israelites, their past, their present and their future. In fact, here in chapter 11, verse 1, it

says, "Has God cast his people away? God forbid." There is this three chapter discussion on how God's calling of them, how his working in their lives runs as a parallel to ours.

Then you get to chapter 12. Chapter 12 says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." And from that point to the end of the book of Romans, it challenges us how do we live this thing called life with Jesus in a relationship thereof? How do we relate to other believers? How do we relate to a lost world? How do we relate to typically a secular institution and government entities? How do we handle ourselves among those that are weak of faith and quick to stumble?

You see, when you cross the book of Romans at 30,000 feet, there is this incredible discourse of what it means to be saved by faith and then beginning in chapter 12, it shares with us how to live that out. There is this section in chapters 9 through 11, it's almost if you allow me to say it, it's almost as if it's a parenthesis, it's almost as if the brake has been pulled and the Apostle Paul through the Lord's inspiration is saying, "Okay, as we talked about who we are and we're about to talk about how we are to act and to live, we need to look back at what we know as the Israelites, the people of God throughout all of time, see how he interacted with them, and thus utilize that as how he interacts with us today."

So when you read this passage, "Has he forgotten his people. God forbid," there's this unique position that not only chapter 11 but chapters 9 through 11 have in what we know, not just the book of Romans but Scripture in totality which leads to the second concept, it's the idea there's precedence that is set here. You look in verse 5 and you look in verse 7 of chapter 11, it says that this grace was done by election. Now when we hear the term election in our culture, in our society, we typically think of a voting process, democracy, republic, whatever construct that we're dealing with, what we know as biblical theological election is completely different than what we think of as a secular Westerner. The concept of election in Scripture is this: it is God's will displayed and put forth at his discretion without any input or variance from anybody else. In other words, just because he's God, he does it.

So there in verse 5 it says it was this election by grace. There in verse 7 and later toward the end of chapter 11, this same construct is used and so how do you look at these people known as the Israelites, these people who God called out from the Ur of Chaldees when Abraham went to the land he knew not of? These people who he brought forth what we know as the Messiah Jesus Christ? Yet these same people as a whole, generally speaking, stood on the front steps of Pilate's palace and said, "Crucify him!" And it says, "Has God cast them away? God forbid, but election of grace."

I want you to go back to the book of Isaiah 42 and I want us to unpack this word today, what does it mean, because there is a thing we utilize called the rule or the law of first mention. Anytime you're studying throughout the Scriptures, the first time that an idea, the first time that a construct is utilized, we need to kind of see how is it utilized because

it will guide us as it is used in the rest of Scripture. This concept, this idea of election is referenced specifically in the book of Isaiah and the first time we come across it, it's in chapter 42, verse 1. It says, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law." Do you see how many times the word "he" or "his" is utilized? The first time we have this concept of God instrumenting his will at his discretion without anybody else's input, he is talking about the fact that Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Savior of humanity, is going to come on behalf of their sins. Let me make it very clear: our opportunity for forgiveness, our opportunity for salvation through Jesus Christ, does not come because we deserve it. It does not come because somehow we've done enough to equate and now we are worthy thereof, or we've done so much "bad and/or evil" it dismisses us from. He says the opportunity for forgiveness, salvation, redemption, reconciliation, has nothing to do with how you and I have responded to him but the fact that Jesus Christ is his plan, his person by which he is going to instrument the opportunity for the salvation of our souls.

The first mention of this word has everything to do with Jesus and nothing to do with anything else, which leads us to three chapters to the right to chapter 45, the second mention of which will be duplicated again in chapter 65. In verse 4 of Isaiah 45, it says, "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect." It's interesting because when you go back into the Old Testament, you discover that God called out Abraham and then Isaac was the son of promise and Jacob would have what we know as the 12 tribes that would eventually make up what we know as the Israelite people that Paul was addressing in chapter 11 when he says, "Has he forsaken his people? God forbid, I am an Israelite." When you look at that term, I want you to notice that Jacob is called the servant but Israel is referred to as the elect. Israel was the corporate name that the Lord gave to Jacob not to represent him as an individual but declare who the people of God would be collectively.

This is important as we understand what Romans 11 is saying, what we understand what Romans 9 through 11 is saying because even the Apostle Paul says, "Even though the majority of my brethren have rejected Jesus, I'm saved. And even though the majority of them said, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' he has not done away with his people as a whole, as an entity just because many or few have decided not to believe and to rebel." So incredible precedence that we have here when it says this election by grace, that it's through the person of Jesus Christ and what we know as Israel was the instrument of which God utilized to bring salvation to humanity. It was Israel who would be the seed of, it would be Israel that would be the lineage of, it would be Israel. In fact, think about it in these terms: how many times at Christmas do we sing songs with the word Israel in it? We don't sing a whole lot of songs about individuals of the Christmas story but we sing a lot of songs about Israel in totality because it was the means and the mechanism by which he chose in his discretion to bring the person of salvation, Jesus Christ, to humanity.

Now go back to Romans 11 because in light of this precedence, it brings up a very intriguing possibility. As you read Romans 11, there is a reference back to the story of Elijah. There is a reference back to the fact that when the Baal worshipers were defeated and he felt all alone and he was pouting under the tree and the Lord said, "Don't worry. I've got 7,000 other men that haven't bowed the knee. They're going to join you and you're going to be a mighty force on my behalf." It's a great story from the book of 1 Kings, a fabulous story of God's supernatural interjection into what we know as the natural world, but it's not the only story that's mentioned. In fact, in chapters 9 through 11 of the book of Romans, there are 28 references, quotations or allusions to the Old Testament.

Now think about that for just a moment. In three chapters of the Bible, we have 28 references to the Old Testament. It reminds me very much of the book of Revelation. Now I know the book of Revelation is one of those books in the Bible where people at times either are frightful or fearful thereof and won't even begin to dig through the process. Can I share with you why I believe so many people struggle with the book of Revelation? Because in 22 chapters, there are over 250 references to the Old Testament. Why is it time that we read through this last half of the book of Romans and at times we struggle with it? Because in three chapters there are 28 references to the Old Testament, listen to this, involving 14 books of your Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, 1 Kings, Proverbs, Psalms, Isaiah, and everybody's favorite, Nahum. Yes, all being utilized as precedence for what he was sharing.

I say the possibility. You know, Matthew 24 is one of those chapters in the Bible that has caused some great comfort and others great conflict. There is Jesus on the Mount of Olives. The disciples have gathered around him. He is days from his crucifixion and they begin to discuss the Temple Mount and that glorious building that's on the hill and his disciples ask him two very strategic questions. Question 1: what will be the events leading up to this? What will this look like when the temple is taken down? Second question: what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the world? Jesus begins to masterfully unpack the answers to these questions to the disciples. What's interesting is if you fly over Matthew 24 at 30,000 feet, you see Jesus answer the first question, then take a break and then answer the second question. It is that break, it is that pause that I want to allude to this morning. In that pause, he alludes to the fig tree and he says, "When you see the fig tree start to bloom, you know that it is the last days. You know that it is the last generation." He keeps talking about the fig tree.

Why is that important? Because right in the midst of talking about the temple, in the midst of the second coming, in the midst of the world ending, he says, "Now let me give you a barometer. Look to the fig tree." Almost every time you look at the fig tree in the Old Testament, do you know what it's a reference to? Israel. This group of which the Lord chose, this group of which he elected to be the means and the mechanism not only of his first coming but hear me clearly, it's also of his second coming as well because when you get to the book of Revelation. Do you know what you discover? The 12 tribes are identified again. The temple is on the mount again. And so the means and the instrument of the first coming is also the means and instrument of the second coming.

So why is that important about the possibility here? Is it possible that in Romans 9-11, specifically 11 that we read today, that as you fly from 30,000 feet, as we see what does it mean to be a child of God, what does it mean to live as a child of God, that in the middle thereof, almost like the fig tree illustration that Jesus used, that the Lord has given us insight, he's given us a picture that we need to look back and we need to learn from the calling that God had on Israel and their response thereof, on what that means for us and how it impacts not just what we believe but how we live it out. I mean, think about the Israelites. Chapter 4 it said Abraham wasn't justified by works but by faith, but can we also agree that Abraham had some struggles as well? That whole Hagar incident. Men like David called a man after God's own heart, and there's this thing called Bathsheba, and we discover that even though their rebellion and their sin was never condoned by God, their lack of faithfulness, their lack of obedience did not disqualify – hear me clearly – their relationship with God.

You see, once you roll out of chapter 8 of the book of Romans into chapter 12, it goes from what do we believe and who do we believe on, to how do we live this thing out, and there is no better picture of what it means to walk with the Lord than Israel. There were times that there was great celebration and revival, there were times they were in captivity at the hands of a foreign entity. So when you look at all the Old Testament references, when you look at all of the book of the Bible, you see this possibility that much like the fig tree in Matthew 24, that the Apostle Paul under the Lord's direction is using Israel to give this incredible insight on our relationship with him which leads to the last intriguing thought here. In fact, I want to go beyond what we read and go to verse 25 and 26. It's a passage of Scripture that many have declared is one of the most difficult not just in Romans 11 but in the entirety of the New Testament. It says,

25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. 26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

And I want to talk about the prophecy of this text. It says, "I would not have you ignorant of this mystery." That phrase is used one other time out of the lips of the Apostle Paul and it's found later in the New Testament when he says, "I would not have you be ignorant of this mystery, we shall not all sleep but in the moment, in a twinkling of the eye, the Lord shall declare and those that are dead in Christ shall be raised and those who are alive in Christ shall be transformed and changed." Interesting that both times this phrase is used, it's what we would call apocalyptic, end time, second coming language. But notice what we just read, that blindness in part has come to the Israelites but there's a day coming where the time of the Gentiles, the influence of the Gentiles, the prominence of the Gentiles will wane and, yes, Israel shall rise to the forefront again. As I mentioned, the tribes in chapter 7 of Revelation, the temple in chapter 11, and yet what did Jesus utilize in 24? The fig tree, Israel.

You and I are a blessed generation, that we have 2,000 years to look back on and see how God has moved and a group of people who are basically unknowns for 2,000 years have risen again to prominence in this land and it just so happens to be Israel. So when you read this passage in Romans 11, it declares an important truth for us, that as we look at God's plan, unmerited by our works, unmerited by our somehow favorability with him, we discover that his plan has a beginning and an end. We discover that there's a day coming where the time of the Gentiles, the prominence of the Gentiles will come to a close. There is a time coming where you're going to see this shift and see this change and so you and I cannot be guilty today of saying, "You know, I know what God wants from me but I'm gonna wait til tomorrow. I'm gonna wait until next week. I'm gonna wait til next month. I tell you what, when the kids grow up, when the bank account gets bigger, when I get a better job." How guilty are we of that every single day?

You see, from 30,000 feet, you realize that the next stage of your life looks the same distance as tomorrow does. You realize from 30,000 feet the next generations of life look no further away than next week does. You see, one of the struggles that we have is we get caught in the weeds. We get caught in the ebbs and flows of life and we don't see it from God's perspective. None of us know what tomorrow brings. None of us know what next week brings. None of us knows what next year or next generation brings, but we know what this day brings and so let us not be guilty of delaying today what may not even be a possibility tomorrow.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that individual here today, maybe you're here for the first time, maybe you can't count the number of times you've been in an environment such as this, but maybe somehow, some way, the proverbial light bulb turned on and today you realize that it's not about what you do, it's not about what you don't do, it's not about works, it's not about worthiness, but it's about his willingness to extend his grace and his mercy to your life through the person of Jesus Christ. You know, maybe you're that individual today, Romans 10:13, there's this incredible verse, it says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Maybe that's who you are today. Maybe you're that person who needs to call on him and be saved and be forgiven. Can I encourage you to do so, just have a conversation? I know technically scripturally we would call it prayer, just have a conversation with the Lord. This conversation doesn't have to be held out loud, it doesn't even have to contain the same words that I might say, but maybe your conversation would go a little something like this. "God, today I realize, I realized I'm the problem. There is nothing I can do to earn your mercy and grace. God, I also realize there is nothing I can stop doing that will make me worthy of your mercy and grace. I realize that millennia ago you called forth Jesus Christ to be the sacrifice and the substitute for my sin. God, today I believe that Jesus Christ is the answer. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to pay the price for my sins on his cross and three days later as we sang about earlier, the grave was found empty and forgiveness and salvation was now attainable by what he did in my stead. So God, today I declare emphatically that I'm the one with the

sin problem and Jesus Christ is the only answer. I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who had that conversation. We'd love to have a conversation with you. We just want to celebrate with you. In just a few moments, we'd love to cherish that opportunity just to have a conversation. Maybe you're that person who had that conversation with the Lord years ago, maybe even decades ago, and there are struggles and difficulties, maybe a lack of obedience in following through, or maybe the Lord said you need to be a part of this incredible body of believers, whatever it may be, we just would love to celebrate how the Lord is moving in your life.

Heavenly Father, as we continue our time of service and worship today, oh, you are so good to us. There is nothing we have done to deserve your grace. There is nothing that we have stopped to deserve your mercy. You are just that good and gracious to us. Lord, at this time we cherish it, this moment that what I know oftentimes we're so guilty of saying next week, next month, next year, Lord, may that not be our statement. May it be this moment, this time, this day, that we yield to your goodness and grace. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as our team leads us. Whatever decision, I'll be right here at the front.