

Scripture Reading:

Acts 21:10 “And as we stayed many days [at Caesarea], a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’” 12 Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." 14 So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." 15 And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem. 16 Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge. 17 And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.”

Romans 15:24 “Whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while. 25 But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. 26 For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem... 30 Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, 31 that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. 33 Now the God of peace be with you all.” Amen.

"Paul's Heart for His People"

Saul of Tarsus, who was converted and commissioned by Jesus as Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles, is making yet another journey to Jerusalem!

- I want to consider at some length this week just why this was the case and I will use Paul's own words for most of the explanation! [*compare last week*]

Paul had a great love for his people, the Jews, and he knew that God was not yet finished dealing with them! There are also two things that we need to remember from a historical perspective:

- 1) Paul made several trips to Jerusalem, perhaps as many as six or seven when you consider all the references in Acts & his Epistles.
- 2) Paul and the other leaders of the Church understood that Jesus meant what He said about all that would occur within that generation: Which would be culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

The Church had been empowered by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost in Jerusalem and the disciples were sent forth from there to be witnesses for Jesus! Some or most of the Apostles remained there and the first Church council was held at Jerusalem!

- But just as Joshua had to cross over the Jordan and take the promised land, so the Church had now been commissioned to go forth and take the Gospel to ALL the nations of the world!

This was VERY difficult for the Jews to understand on two levels: They had always been God's special people and so they wrongly looked down on the Gentiles AND Jerusalem had been God's dwelling place for a thousand years!

- It would have been VERY difficult for them to imagine its total destruction by the Romans!

So how was Paul dealing with all of this as he wrestled with these truths in his own mind and reached out to his fellow Jews to help them understand as well?

We don't ponder this as often as we should because we think of Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles, which he was, but he was also a Jew who loved his people and their city! We should give this some thought AND we do not have to speculate about what the Apostle was thinking because he went to great lengths to communicate exactly what he was thinking! As we saw in our text, Paul's letter to the Church at Rome was written just prior to this final journey to Jerusalem.

- Thus, this Epistle is a good place to better understand what Paul was thinking.

His thoughts about his people the Jews, are found in those controversial chapters nine through eleven that are often ignored in many Church circles these days. We do so because Paul is so blunt at some points that it makes even the best of us reformers just a bit nervous, but we ignore them at our peril.

- Paul is wrestling with the BIG questions about God's promises, God's love and the reality of a nation that had turned their back on the Messiah.

This brings up the tough questions about how God can allow evil in a world that He created and completely controls and whether man has any real significance if God is the one who makes all the ultimate decisions.

- Yes, these passages can make us uneasy in places, but they also provide some of the greatest comfort to be found in all the Scriptures.
- In them we see why Paul was willing to not only be bound by the Jews in Jerusalem but even to die there for the sake of the Gospel.
- In these chapters we will see why the Gospel, the Good News, is the same for Jew and Gentile alike.
- And in them we see that God administers perfect justice without violating His precious promises.

Finally, we will have a much better understanding of what is happening in Acts with Paul in the weeks ahead!

So, before starting this final journey to Jerusalem the Apostle Paul writes his letter to the Romans from Corinth and sends it on its way. In the first eight chapters Paul gives them the most comprehensive treatment that we have in all the Scriptures about how the just shall live by faith: God's gracious salvation! Then beginning at chapter nine he explains to the Saints in Rome why this trip to Jerusalem is so important to him, and ultimately to all the world.

- As he begins there is no question about where his heart lies:
Would any of us be willing to be damned for the sake of others?

Romans 9:1 "I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."

- Look at all the blessings God poured out on the Jews and now they are facing destruction! *[discuss date]* Many wrestled with how this could be! So Paul shows that God will not be thwarted in His plans...

6 "But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, 7 nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." 8 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. 9 For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son."

- Paul explains that just being circumcised is not enough, just as we must remember that being baptized is not enough: Both must be apprehended by faith!

And just so no one could miss this important point Paul moves on in the history of Israel for an even stronger example...

10 "And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac 11(for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), 12 it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." 13 As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.""

- Paul makes the doctrine of eternal election very clear and he also anticipates the reaction!

14 "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. 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."

- After using example from Israel, Paul turns to a famous Gentile to show that the same principle applies to the Gentiles...
- God chose Pharaoh to demonstrate His wrath, just as he predestined other Gentiles like King Nebuchadnezzar to be objects of His mercy.
- Just so no one can miss his point Paul clearly restates it and then goes on to answer further objections...

18 "Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, & whom He wills He hardens. 19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" 20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? 22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?"

- Paul reminds us that there are some questions we do not get to ask!
- Paul spent those first eight chapters explaining the dilemma that man faced because of sin and the great plan of salvation that God prepared for His people, but if you want to know why Mrs. Jones was given the gift of faith and Mr. Owens was not, Paul bluntly reminds us that we have not been given that insight & like clay trying to speak to the potter, we have no right to ask.
- Paul then shows how the Gospel is to go to all the world, and we should feel how difficult it is for the Jews to understand this truth at that time.

25 "As He says also in Hosea: "I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved." 26 "And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God." 27 Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved. 28 For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the Lord will make a short work upon the earth." 29 And as Isaiah said before: "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, & we would have been made like Gomorrah." 30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 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. 33 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."

- In chapter 10 Paul again expresses his personal agony for his people
- In doing so he reminds them AND us again that there is hope in the Gospel, even for the Jewish people!

Romans 10:1 “ Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. 5 For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them." 6 But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down from above) 7 or, " 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.”

- Jesus confronted the religious leaders of His day with this same challenge: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”
- Both Jew & Gentile must hear the Gospel to be saved: This in part is why Paul is again returning to Jerusalem!

14 “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"

- Even though Paul is the Apostle to the Gentiles, we can see that he still loves his people and wants them to hear the Gospel!
- He also knows that he will face much resistance when he preaches it to them in Jerusalem!

16 “But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" 17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. 18 But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: "Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world."

19 But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: "I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation." 20 But Isaiah is very bold and says: "I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me." 21 But to Israel he says: "All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people."

- Paul is going to Jerusalem to help deliver the gifts being sent, while there he will take the opportunity to preach the Gospel AND to report on the amazing reception the Gentiles have given this same Good News that he preaches.
- In Chapter eleven Paul then deals with how the nation of Israel that resided in the land of Canaan relates to the new Israel, the Church which we know has always existed as God’s covenant people.

Romans 11:1 “ I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, 3 "Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek

my life"? 4 But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 6 And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace."

- Jesus pronounced the destruction of Jerusalem during the final week of His earthly ministry.
- The veil of the Temple was torn from top to bottom as He died as the final sacrifice for sins!
- And yet, 5,000 were saved at Pentecost and thousands more in the weeks and months that followed.
- Paul reminds his Roman readers that these Jews were saved by the same gracious Gospel that had been poured out there in Rome!

"But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. 7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. 8 Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day." 9 And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them. 10 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, And bow down their back always."

- Think about how difficult it would have been for Paul to pen these words knowing that the destruction of Jerusalem was only a few years away!
- BUT he goes on to show that God is not through with the Jewish people...

11 "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. 12 Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! 13 For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. 15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." 20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. 22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again."

- Pastor Wilson has rightly pointed out that many in the modern church have made a division or distinction at exactly the point where the Apostle Paul teaches unity and common ground!
- Today we often talk about the Old Covenant and New Covenant as being two different plans of salvation, but notice that Paul talks about the same root and fatness that is His covenant salvation for BOTH Jews and Gentiles!
- The Gentiles are NOT grafted into a new tree!
- They are adopted into God's family and have the same promises that were given to Adam in the garden, the promises given to Abraham and the promises given to Moses or King David or the Prophets!
- These promises have come to the Gentiles who must now live by faith!

- **AND finally, Paul reminds them that God is not yet finished with the Jews who can still be part of the New Israel!**

24 “For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? 25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; 27 For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." 28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, 31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. 32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.”

- **We should see how the Apostle Paul has come full circle, where he again points to the doctrine of election: God chooses to save some of the Jewish people and some are lost...**
- **But now he does not give as blunt a response to those who wonder how this works...**
- **Rather Paul reminds them that as creatures we will never fully understand the mind of God...**
- **Something that should not trouble us, but cause us to wonder & praise His Holy Name!**
[an eternal blessing!]

33 “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" 35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" 36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

- **The hope of the Jewish people is the hope of the Gentiles: The Gospel!**

Paul is going to Jerusalem to help them understand something that the Church in America struggles with today:

- **The city of Jerusalem is going to be destroyed and the promises of God the Father to His Son are much broader than the land of Palestine!**
- **Today Jesus reigns on high and has sent His Spirit to fill His Church, the New Jerusalem.**
- **Our commission is to be witnesses for Jesus to all the earth, Disciplining ALL the nations of the world!**

Emmanuel has come and He has ransomed His captive people: Both Jew and Gentile. As Paul rightly proclaims, ALL Israel will be saved!

- **In response this morning we will rejoice and sing of that glorious truth!**

Communion Meditation: Genesis 9 [Jehovah speaks to Noah & his sons]

11 “Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” 12 And God said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: 13 I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. 14 It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; 15 and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." 17 And God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that is on the earth." "