

GOD'S MISSION TO A LOST WORLD

Romans 9:1-33
Key verse 9:28

"For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality."

In Romans chapters 1-8 we learned that we are all clothed by the righteousness of God when we believe in Jesus. So Paul said in 1:17b, "The righteous will live by faith." We are not righteous at all. But by the blood of Jesus, we are freely justified and glorified; now we are called the righteous children of God. Not only so, but we also have a living hope that we will be heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ in the kingdom of God. In Romans chapters 9-11 Paul explains God's purpose of world salvation work. For this, God chose Israel as his own people and gave them a glorious mission of world salvation work. But they abandoned God's mission. What then did God do for the world salvation work? God has kept on doing world salvation work. How? Paul answers this question in these chapters. Chapter 9 tells us how God had tried to accomplish world salvation work through his people Israel. It did not work as God had hoped. Anyway God reaches out his hand of salvation to the Gentiles.

I. God's mission through his people Israel (1-18)

First, the Apostle Paul's heavy heart. (1-3) As we know well, Paul was a Jew, a Pharisee. He loved his people. Before his conversion, Paul dedicated himself to Judaism. He was nationalistic in character. He was a slave of selfish ambition and racial prejudice. After conversion, he received the grace of forgiveness of sin, and at the same time he received the apostleship for the evangelization of the entire Gentile world. (Ro 1:5; Ac 9:15,16) After receiving grace and apostleship, Paul worked harder than anyone to evangelize the Gentile people. Then his fellow people looked upon him as a traitor and an apostate. To Paul, his own people's misunderstanding did not matter. What really mattered to him was his people's unbelief toward God. God chose them and made them a priestly nation so that through them the whole world might be filled with the knowledge of God.

This glorious plan of world salvation work of God virtually began with the call of Abraham. (Gn 12:1-3) Then God kept on doing the work of salvation with his chosen people Israel. (Ex. 19:5,6) The record of this work runs through the Old Testament. How did his people respond? Not only did they fail to reach out to a lost world, but they even missed the way themselves. To Paul, they are still his "brothers"; his close relation whose souls are his concern. When Paul saw his people's unbelief toward God, he felt the unremitting anguish of soul. Paul had the perpetual limit of love in God for his people, that it may proceed even unto death. (Read 1-3)

Second, the spiritual blessings and responsibility. (4,5) As we know well, there are two kinds of blessings. One is material blessing, which is temporal. The other is spiritual blessing, which is everlasting. Material blessing is like becoming a Yuppie. Spiritual blessing is like becoming a servant of God like King David or St. Paul. It is worldly consensus that everyone wants to be better off by believing Jesus.

So it is very hard for any person to think spiritual blessing is better than material blessing. The same was true of Israel. God had poured out his blessings on Israel. Look at 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!" In these verses, eight special blessings are mentioned. The first is "the adoption as sons." (Ex 4:22) In the past, to be adopted as a son in an aristocratic Roman family was a great blessing to the people of Roman satellite countries. How much more a blessing for Israel to be adopted as sons of God Almighty! The second was "the divine glory." Here "glory" means God's revelation to his people. It also means that God was in their midst. God scarcely reveals himself to mundane men. In the Bible, God revealed himself to a limited number of people. For example, God revealed himself to Moses in glory on Mt. Sinai. God revealed himself to the Son of Man on the top of the Transfiguration Mount in shining glory. It was indeed a great blessing for Israel that they had the privilege of seeing the glory of God. Those who see only evil people become like those evil people and live in this world with the fear of living among evil people. On the other hand, those who see the glory of God can have the glory of God in their hearts and live in this world gloriously and victoriously, not fearfully. So it is necessary for us to see the glory of God. We can see the glory of God, sometimes through Bible study and prayer, and sometimes through obedience to the will of God.

The third is "the covenants" of God. The covenant is God's specific promises to his own people. God made Abraham his covenant people. This covenant had been undergirding Jewish confidence that they were a covenant people of God. Their confidence in being a covenant people made them mighty strong until they knew no defeat. They were always victorious in any situation. (Gn 12,15, 17) The fourth is the receiving of the "law." The law refers to the Ten Commandments. Spiritually speaking, it is the foundation of the Bible. The Bible is the Word of life. The fifth is "the temple worship," the same as worship service. It is indeed a great blessing that the children of God come to the church of God and listen to the voice of God through the Bible and repent their sins and renew their spirits. Worship does not mean to carry out a certain series of liturgy or rites in routine. It means to praise God, thank God and honor God as God. The sixth is "the promises," which are basically the same as the covenants. However, the promises focus on the Messiah, while the covenant emphasizes the relationship between God and his people.

The seventh is the patriarchs. They are all the greatest fathers of faith who ever lived. They were all men and women of God who had lived for the glory of God and for the blessing of God's holy children. For a nation, even to have one man whose spiritual quality can be equal to that of one of the patriarchs is truly great. But there has been none. So people of the world borrow their names, beginning with Abraham Lincoln and Benjamin Franklin. But the people of Israel have so many great men of God to look up to. They are indeed blessed people. The representatives of the patriarchs are Abraham, David and Jesus Christ.

The eighth is "the human ancestry of Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ is God over all, forever praised. At that time the Jews did not recognize Jesus as the Son of God. They only recognized him as the son of a Nazarene carpenter. But Paul makes a forthright declaration that Jesus is God

over all, forever praised. Of course, when he said this, Paul had his own people on his mind. He had a heart's desire to gain his people over to Jesus. Of course, Paul knew how his people rejected and crucified Jesus Christ. So it was dangerous to declare the divinity of Jesus. But Paul does not compromise; he does not remove Christ as God and from the place of Messiahship, nor does he deny the uniqueness of Christ. Paul's endeavor to win his people's allegiance to Christ was truly great. Still his message was Jesus is Christ, who is God over all. "Christ is God over all" means Christ is God for all mankind over all circumstances, events, nations and ages. "Christ is God over all" should be all Christians' motto. Also, "Christ is God over all" is indeed the key point of the message in the proclamation of the gospel to the entire world. This message has a direct bearing upon the church of Jesus Christ, which it should bear as the mission from God.

Here we learn that God's blessings are "holy privileges." All privilege requires tremendous responsibility. For example, according to Bible teaching, marriage is the focal point of God's blessings on the basis of God's command, "Be fruitful." (Gn 1:28) But to a man, the blessing of marriage requires a tremendous responsibility of supporting his wife and children without fail. It is required of a woman who has the blessing of marriage, to mother her husband and her children. It is tragedy that God's chosen people enjoyed God's blessings to the full extent. But they never carried out their responsibility as a priestly nation.

Third, God had never failed. (6-18) Look at verse 6. "It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." God's chosen people became extremely proud that they were a chosen people and descendants of Abraham. They saw the Gentile people as if they were pigs or firewood. They thought God had failed in keeping his promise to Abraham if they were not his chosen people with special blessings and privileges. When we think about his chosen people's ignorance of God's high purpose for them, it looks as though God had failed in fulfilling his purpose of world salvation work. Especially when we see that his chosen people rejected the promised Messiah and crucified him on the cross by means of foreign soldiers, it looks as if God had failed completely. But that is not the case. God had not failed in his purpose of world salvation, even if they had rejected him.

God did not abandon his world salvation plan even if his chosen people had abandoned God and his holy mission. God chose his servants according to his sovereign will and fulfilled his world salvation work. For example, Ishmael, a son of Abraham's maidservant should have been chosen as God's chosen one, because he was the firstborn son. But God chose Isaac in place of Ishmael. God chose his servants according to his sovereign will, even though it looks odd in man's estimation. Look at verse 8. "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." Only those who believe in the promise are Abraham's true offspring because they inherited the spiritual heritage of Abraham. God chose spiritual children and kept on doing world salvation work.

We also learn that predestination for world salvation is God's sovereign will. Look at verse 9. "For this was how the promise was

stated: 'At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.'" According to his time schedule God appointed the time of Isaac's birth. Rebekah was told that "the older will serve the younger." Before they were born God rejected Esau, the older one, and chose Jacob, the younger one. God chose the younger in defiance of the accepted law of inheritance. God chose Jacob despite his unlovely character. Genesis tells us Esau was a sporty and personable fellow. On the other hand, Jacob was a crafty crook who evokes no sympathy. Our minds dispute such arbitrary dealing. However, we are not to measure the eternal God in our limited minds.

Before going further, it is good for us to make the meaning of "predestination" clear. Romans 8:28-30 dealt with predestination in the context of Christian assurance. 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." This verse explains the meaning of predestination most excellently. Predestination and election are two words with the same meaning. Predestination or election is God's one-sided choosing. God is like a football coach who chooses and changes his team members according to his plan. Like wise, God chooses his servants according to his sovereign will and purpose. He chooses those who love him. Here one thing is clear: We did not choose God, but God chose us to bear fruit. (Jn 15:16) It is a great privilege to be chosen in a big football game, even as a bench boy, not to mention quarterback. How much more a blessing it is for us to be chosen as his servants in his world salvation work and history! We can understand better the meaning of predestination when we think about God's choosing his one and only Son to die on the cross to save men from their sins. God by grace alone chose his Son Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world was laid, and appointed him to be Shepherd of our souls and our Brother. John explains this truth exquisitely. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." So Calvin said, "Predestination begins at the wounds of Christ on the cross."

God's predestination in world salvation is based on his mercy and compassion. In verses 14-18 we find the word "mercy" 5 times and "compassion" 2 times. Verse 15 says, "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.'" Verse 16 says, "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." Verse 18a says, "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." Therefore God's predestination in world salvation is nothing but God's saving grace for all mankind.

We studied that God's predestination is redemptive. When we read verses 14-18 carefully one more time we also learn that God's predestination in world salvation is also retributive. For example, God sent Moses to Egypt to deliver his people from slavery. King Pharaoh hardened his heart and did not listen to Moses. (17) At that time, Pharaoh was the leader of the world empire. So he was not hardened as a private individual but as an arrogant ruler of a world empire. Pharaoh hardened his heart, ignoring the message of God. Then God struck him with 10 plagues. At the last plague, the plague of the firstborn, Pharaoh was crushed by the death of his firstborn son. In this way, God displayed his power to the world through Pharaoh. So we call this Pharaoh's arbitrary

hardening by God. Here we learn that we should not harden our hearts lest any of us be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Heb. 3:8-15; 4:7,13)

II. God finishes his work of salvation (19-33)

First, talking back to God. (19-24) Paul knew that his people wanted to enjoy God's blessings and privileges for them. But they were not willing to obey his world salvation purpose for them. They were too proud and self-righteous to obey God's whole world salvation plan, including the Gentiles. In this way, they resisted God's plan of whole world salvation and their calling to be a priestly nation. But they blamed God, saying that God resisted his will for his people. They complained that God did not treat his people exceptionally from other people. Their point was that God's promise to them was inconsistent. (19) But in fact their complaint came when they did not honor God as God, and when they did not recognize God's sovereign rule. Their complaint came when they became lazy and neglected their mission from God. Paul rebukes their unbelief and narrowmindedness. Paul rebukes their worm's-eye view of God. Look at verse 20. "'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.''" Again, Paul emphasizes the sovereignty of God. Look at verse 21. "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?" We live in a society that has majored in human rights. But we must know that man has only duty toward God. According to the Bible teaching, man's chief purpose is to enjoy and please God.

In verses 22 and 23, Paul reiterates that there are only two classes of mankind. One is the Pharaoh kind of people, the other is the David kind of people. The former kind are the objects of God's wrath and destruction through their sin and adultery. Read verse 22. "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?" The latter kind are the objects of God's mercy fitted for the glory of God. Look at verse 23. "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." This truth applies both to the Jews and Gentiles. (24)

Second, God's redemptive work is inclusive. (24-29) Now, Paul gets to the point of why he has been talking about God's sovereign purpose of world salvation work. God, in his sovereign will and wisdom, elected Israel to be his people and a priestly nation to call the Gentiles. The Gentiles were supposed to be objects of God's wrath and anger because of their sins and idolatry. But God, in his great mercy, included the Gentiles in his salvation plan.

The key point of Paul's message is that God's sovereign will of world salvation is not only for the Jews, but for the Gentiles also. Look at verse 24. "Even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles."

Time and again God spoke about his salvation plan for the Gentiles through his prophets. Look at verses 25 and 26. "As he says in Hosea: 'I will call them "my people" who are not my people; and I will call her "my loved one" who is not my loved one,' and, 'It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," they

will be called "sons of the living God." God's election or choosing has bigger boundaries than our finite minds can grasp. We also learn that God's predestination, election or choosing is the undeserving grace of God. How wonderful it is to know that God, by a miracle of grace, included the Gentiles, even though they were worthless because of their sin and idolatry.

God included the Gentiles in his world salvation plan, but it doesn't mean that God does not love his own people. So Paul confirms that God loves his people to the end. Here Paul quotes Isaiah 10:22,23 in verse 27: "Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.'" This has a historical background. Israel was under the captivity of Assyria. All the children of Israel deserved to perish like straw in the flaming fire. But God, in his great mercy, intervened in their misery, and a remnant was miraculously saved. God's love for his own people is unfathomable. Acknowledging God's love for his people again, Paul quotes Isaiah 1:9 in verse 29: "It is just as Isaiah said previously: 'Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.'" Without God's saving grace his people would have long ago perished.

Third, God finishes his salvation work. (28) Look at verse 28. "For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality." This verse is a powerful theme of Christian faith. The point of this verse is that God himself will accomplish the work of world salvation according to his promises. In view of history, this is true. God's chosen people abandoned their mission as a priestly nation. When one person, Paul, accepted missionary calling to the Gentile world, his people, who should have prayed and supported him, rejected him vehemently by calling him a traitor. Those who supported him seemed to have been almost helpless persons, such as Lydia of Philippi and Timothy and Epaphroditus and so on. Jesus' disciples were mostly men from the bottom of society. Praise God that we are weak but God is strong. During the last 2,000 years God has done mighty work of salvation, more than we can imagine.

Fourth, the stumbling stone. (30-33) In this part, "the stone" is one of the names of Jesus Christ. "The builders" refer to the Jews who stumbled over the Stone by rejecting the purpose of God and his son Jesus Christ. They failed to win others over to God. They failed to save themselves; they were not part of God's world salvation work. So they could not be part of his church, not to speak of being members in his kingdom. We have our own attitudes toward Jesus Christ. But we must have a Biblical attitude toward Jesus. Jesus is like the same sun which softens the wax and hardens the clay. Jesus is the same stone that makes those who trust in him never be put to shame. On the other hand, the same stone causes those who do not believe in him to stumble, fall and be broken into pieces.

Today we learn that our God uses his sovereignty only to save men from their sins. We also learn that God's abundant blessing on his people involves tremendous responsibility. Our responsibility is to participate in God's whole world salvation work. Otherwise, we have no part with God.