

Children of Abraham, You are God's Israel

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, Proper 13[a]

August 6, 2017

ROMANS 9:1-13

¹ I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. ⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

You are a child of God, you belong to the lineage of Abraham, you are the Israel of God, and you are to doubt this not at all.

You are of God’s Israel, of the lineage of Abraham, and to you belongs all that comes with that—the blessing of being brought into God’s family, the knowledge that your sins are forgiven, the faith that you, who could not justify yourself, have been justified by the voice of your God, the certainty that even while in your body of death, you belong not to death, but to life.

You are to have this knowledge, this faith and certainty, this blessing of the Name of the Lord, with no doubt because, this status of being God’s Israel, of being a child of Abraham, belongs to you not by anything of the flesh, not by any earthly lineage nor by anything your flesh can effect, but by only and fully the promise of God.

That's what Paul wants those in the church in Rome to know. He writes them longing that he could be there with them, and hurting for them that they are being tempted away from the promise.

He writes to them knowing that the Jews among them are being and will continue to be tempted to think that justification before God can be secured according to your bloodline and your heritage, according to how you have been formed up in your culture. And Paul, hurting for these Jews, wants them to know that he, as a fellow Jew, is justified before God not by his bloodline, nor by any conformity to the culture of the church or synagogue, but is justified purely and freely and completely only by the promise.

He writes to them knowing that the Gentiles among them are and will continue to be tempted to think that justification before God can be helped or secured by doing things by which they could show themselves obedient to the ritual laws of the Old Testament, by identifying themselves with the culture of the Temple, by doing something in their flesh by which they could make themselves appear to be clean. And Paul, hurting for these fellow members of the Body of Christ, wants them to know that he, their brother in the faith, is justified before God not by anything he does in the flesh to appear clean, not by any culture of the synagogue or the church with which he identifies, but is justified purely and freely and completely only by the promise.

And, in giving this letter to us as Scripture, we may know that the Holy Spirit wants you and me and our children to know this, too—to know with all certainty that we are justified by God not by anything of bloodline or heritage, nor by any conformity to the culture of the church, but are justified freely and completely only by the promise.

Paul gives us the Word of the Lord, "As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.'" [Romans 9:13]

The words startle—God loving one person but hating another. But for the sinner, this presents God's love as not something a person merits or deserves or works for, but only as something left to the will of God.

It is a love delivered to the sinner only by God's word of promise. The words startle us, but Paul is driving home the point that the sinner is justified only by the word spoken by God; the sinner is brought into the Israel of God only by the call and election of God; thus, the sinner for his confidence, looks not to his own works of the flesh, not to how he is forming himself up into conformity with some earthly heritage, but to only and completely the word of promise. Romans 9:8:

This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

For faith, everything is built on the promise. At the birth of Jacob, the blessing came not according to anything of Jacob, for when the blessing was given, Jacob was still in the womb of his mother, Rebekah. Genesis 25:22:

Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife [Rebekah], because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If all is well, why am I like this?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger."

Two nations from the lineage of Isaac and Rebekah. One nation coming from Esau, the other from Jacob. But there is nothing about Esau which would determine whether the blessing goes to him or not; there is nothing about Jacob that would determine the blessing should go to him. They are both just babies waiting to be born of Rebekah.

Yet, Jacob is blessed. The Lord, we know, will later change Jacob's name to Israel, from the lineage of Israel will come the Christ who takes away the sins of the world, and those who are members of Israel will be those who belong to Christ Jesus.

But, the Lord's startling words of **Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated** will not let us miss the point. Jacob is blessed not because of anything of his flesh—for he is not terribly different than his brother Esau; he is blessed not because of anything of how he forms himself up in life, for it doesn't take much reading in Genesis to find Jacob as conniving, weak, scared man; but Jacob is blessed according to the promise spoken by the Lord, and Jacob holds onto that promise, like a man holding another man to the ground in a full-nelson.

It all depends on the promise. When the Lord speaks promise, his words do not fail, they go forth from his mouth and create the reality of that promise. Romans 9:7-8:

It is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

You are a child of God, you belong to the lineage of Abraham, you are the true Israel of God—you are to have no doubt about this, for all this is yours not by anything of you, but by the promise of God.

The promise of God is that you bear his Name in Baptism, and are cleansed of all sin. The promise is that as his child, he has bound himself to you, even until the end of the age. His promise is that though by flesh you may have not a single drop of the blood of Jacob's earthly lineage in your veins, nevertheless, you are of Jacob, you are of Israel, because the word of God has not failed, not all who are born of the earthly lineage of Israel are of the true Israel of God, it is not those born of the lineage of the flesh which are children of God, the children of the promise are counted as offspring. [Romans 9:8]

Of trying to count on our own flesh and worthiness, of trying to make ourselves children of God by identifying ourselves with some heritage or with the culture of the church, of thinking that how we live our lives can somehow justify us—that's where we find ourselves to be like Esau, who lived according to the flesh, not to the promise, and of all that, we daily repent.

And daily, we fix our ears upon hearing the promise. For with the promise, we are no longer with what our flesh is doing, but are with what God is doing, for he is the one speaking the promise.

Daily, we turn back to his word by which in his grace he chose us to be his own; his Word by which he blessed us with his Name, according to which he now daily forgives us. Daily we return to his promise of Baptism, we return to his blessing, and we rejoice that we are justified not because of any works of our flesh, but because Christ, the Holy One of Israel, has redeemed us with his blood, and he has called us into his Israel, the church.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS