

GOD'S SOVEREIGN MERCY, PT. 2
ROMANS 9:6-13

Unless you are a devout historian, you probably don't know the name [Nicholas Winton](#). "Nicky" Winton died four years ago at the age of 106. That's remarkable, but that's not what is most remarkable about him.



His life began somewhat unremarkably, a Jewish son in an Anglo-Bavarian family that emigrated to England in the 18th century, he was a banker and then stockbroker in England. His life took a dramatic turn in December 1938 when his friend, Martin Blake, ask him to cancel their planned skiing trip to Switzerland and go with him to Prague instead. Winton agreed and they arrived on New Year's Eve, 1938, and were met by the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia. The city had upwards of 250,000 refugees from Germany and Austria, many of whom were Jewish. Meeting the committee, Winton quickly became determined to at least help the children of the families, so he began taking names and making plans for how to get them to England. He took his first group of 20 children in January 1939. After returning home, he would work during the day and then spend each evening organizing permits and travel documents for the children. Because of the slowness of the British government to act and the scarcity of funds to pay £50 bonds for each child, and his perceived urgency for the situation, he began forging documents. Over the next few months, Winton arranged for eight rail transports of children to enter the country. A ninth transport, scheduled to leave on September 1, 1939 was canceled by the Germans and the 250 children on that transport were subsequently taken to concentration camps. In total, Winton and those working with him saved at least 664 children — 561 of them Jewish. He has been called, "the British Schindler."

That is a remarkable story of salvation. Our hearts sing when we hear stories of that kind of sacrifice and service. But friends (and you know this), we have an even greater story of salvation. We have a greater story of One who has worked behind the scenes of our lives, doing for us what we could never do for ourselves — and that is the story of the eternal God who has elected His children to salvation and then secured and produced their salvation at the right time.

This is the story of sovereign salvation, told by the Apostle Paul in Romans 9-11; the story of those chapters is that God is faithful to save His children. He is faithful to His salvation plan for Israel and for us. That plan, which Paul begins to unfold in Romans 9:6-18, reveals that —

SALVATION IS ALWAYS THE RESULT OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN, MERCIFUL, AND FAITHFUL CHOICE.

If you are saved from God's wrath, you are saved as the result of God's sovereign kindness to choose you. Everyone you know that is saved from God's wrath is saved by that same sovereign, merciful choosing.

In verses 6-18, there are five demonstrations of God's faithfulness; we looked at the first two previously; we will look at the second two today:

1. God is Faithful — His Promises Don't FAIL (v. 6a)
2. God is Faithful — His Election Doesn't FAIL (v. 6b)
3. God is Faithful — His Election of Isaac is TYPICAL (vv. 7-9)
4. God is Faithful — His Purposes Will STAND (vv. 10-13)
5. God is Faithful — His Non-Election of Pharaoh is JUST (vv. 14-18)

1. God is Faithful — His Promises Don't FAIL (v. 6a)

- Verses 1-5 are Paul's personal lament for the nation of Israel and her unbelief. Because she has rebelled, some might ask, "Has God been unfaithful to keep His promises to her and will God keep us (Gentiles) in the salvation He has promised to us? If the nation of Israel is not justified and if she is condemned, do we have any hope of escaping wrath? Those are the questions Paul is asking in chs. 9-11 — is God faithful and trustworthy?
- Paul's immediate answer to this anticipated question is an unequivocal, "No!" — ***But it is not as though the word of God has failed.*** Here, his reference to the "word of God" is a reference to the covenantal promises of God to Israel. The promises God made to Israel beginning with Abraham did not fail and will not fail (e.g., 11:28-29).
 - ✓ God cannot fail. God has not rejected His people. He will save His people.
 - ✓ And if the nation of Israel can be confident of His salvation of her, then we can be confident of His salvation of us. He is faithful in all His ways. He has promised salvation to Israel and to us, and He will fulfill His promises.

2. God is Faithful — His Election Doesn't FAIL (v. 6b)

- In the middle of v. 4 Paul places the word ***for*** to provide a reason that God's Word has not failed. And the reason quite simply is that ***they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.***
- With that statement, Paul is making a statement about the nature of the term Israel. Here ***Israel*** refers to one's spiritual heritage and spiritual identity. That is, there are promises that were given to the nation, but not everyone believes in those promises the way Abraham did, and thus not everyone who has the national identity has the spiritual identity. This is the same principle as in 2:28-29 — to receive the spiritual promises to Abraham, one must be circumcised in the heart through the work of the Spirit. It is necessary to believe in Christ as the Messiah to be a genuine and true Israelite.
- When Paul says ***they are not all Israel*** he is also introducing the idea that some are excluded from "spiritual Israel." Not all national Israelites have been saved and not all national Israelites have been individually chosen and elected for salvation. Paul is introducing a theological concept that is going to dominate the rest of this chapter and section (chs. 9-11) — the theme of divine election (9:11).

Definition — "[Election is] that act of God whereby He, in His sovereign good pleasure, and on account of no foreseen merit in them, chooses a certain number of men to be the recipients of special grace and of eternal salvation. More briefly it may be said to be God's eternal purpose to save some of the human race in and by Jesus Christ." [Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 114.]

- Remember that this statement by Paul is designed to address the anticipated question, “Is God faithful to keep His promise (particularly to Israel and for salvation)?”
 - ✓ Paul’s answer is “Yes, God is faithful to His promises.”
 - ✓ Everyone who has been chosen for salvation will be saved. If God has made a promise, He will keep it; if He has made a promise of sonship for anyone, that one *will* be made His child.
 - ✓ God’s elective plan is a provision of mercy for those who deserved His wrath (9:23).
 - ✓ What follows are three illustrations of God’s elective work: Isaac, Jacob, and Pharaoh.

3. God is Faithful — His Election of Isaac is TYPICAL (vv. 7-9)

- To demonstrate that not all Israelites are chosen and part of the promise, Paul uses the story of Isaac.
 - ✓ **Nor are they all children...** (v. 7) Just being in Abraham’s lineage is not enough. To receive the promise made to Abraham, you have to be part of the right line coming from Abraham.
 - ✓ Abraham had multiple sons/grandsons that became the heads of nations: Isaac/Jacob were the head of Israel; Ishmael was the father of various Arab people groups; Esau was the father of the Edomites. Only those who are descendants from Abraham in Isaac and Jacob’s lines are genuine **children**.
 - ✓ Salvation is not a Jewish birthright; and in the following verses, Paul makes that clear...
- **How God chose Isaac** (which will also be similar for His choice of Jacob, vv. 10-13):
 - ✓ *God made a call* (choice) to use the line of Isaac to complete His promises — **through Isaac**.
 - This is a quotation from **Genesis 21:12** (the first of 33 OT quotations in chs. 9-11).
 - In this statement, God tells Abraham that while Ishmael also would be the father of a great nation (**Gen. 21:13**), the promise would be fulfilled through Isaac (**Gen. 17:19-21**).
 - Isaac’s “advantage” had nothing to do with him, or with Abraham or Sarah. His “advantage” was solely the result of God’s choice (notice that Abraham didn’t choose Isaac; in fact, Abraham wanted God to use Ishmael to fulfill His promise (**Gen. 17:18**). Isaac was God’s choice and provision, and no one else’s (Abraham and Sarah both laughed at God: **Gen. 17:17; 18:12**).
 - At the end of v. 7, Paul says, **your descendants will be named**. “Named” is the word “called.” This is the divine call of God that results in the accomplishment of His will (e.g., **8:28**). God’s call is the call that gives life to the dead and brings non-existent things into existence (**4:17**). Here, God’s call brings a people into fellowship with God through fulfillment of a covenant.
 - When Paul says **through Isaac**, he means, “through Isaac, and not Ishmael, by God’s choice.”
 - There is still much grace to Ishmael — he will also be a great nation (**21:17-21**), but he will not be the means by which the Abrahamic covenant is fulfilled, because God chose something else.
 - ✓ *God made a promise* (v. 8). To be a **child of God** requires more than physical heritage (**children of the flesh**). The phrase “children of God” is rare (only 5x in NT); it always refers to those who belong to God and have his salvation (e.g., **8:21**).

- Paul uses “children of God” in parallel with *children of promise* and *descendants*, and in contrast with *children of the flesh*.
 - ... To be a child of God is only the result of God’s promise; Isaac was born only because of the divine intervention of God; those who belong to Israel are only the result of divine intervention, and if we are saved, it is only because of divine intervention (8:30; 9:18).
 - ... The word *regarded* in vv. 7-8 is the word often translated “justify.” To be a child of Abraham always was about faith in the promise made to Abraham (4:13, 16-18, 20, 22ff).
 - ... Abraham’s genuine descendants (those who are “true” Israel) are those who come through faith in the promise made to Abraham that resulted in the birth of Isaac (and then Jacob).
- The spiritual descendants of God have been decreed and planned by God. To be a child of God, one must be chosen by grace and believe in faith.
- “What counts is grace, not race.” [N.T. Wright]
- Election and salvation are on the basis of a promise from God, not on the action of man.
- ✓ *God (alone) acted to fulfill the promise.* Verse 8 tells us that there was a promise that resulted in childhood to God; verse 9 tells us what *the word of promise* was (quotation from **Gen. 18:10, 14**).
- ✓ God’s word to Sarah is the promise of two actions:
 - *At this time I will come* — The emphasis is on God’s activity. He will come and in His coming the promise will be fulfilled; there is nothing in man that produces fulfillment (Abraham and Sarah were barren so long to prove their inability — even 13 years after Ishmael was born).
 - *And Sarah will have a son* — This is a remarkable statement, given her age (90) and Abraham’s age (100). And the good news of the story is that *she did* have a son (**Gen. 21:1ff**). Not only did God promise a son, but God fulfilled His promise.
- **God’s choice of Isaac is typical for how He chooses all men for salvation:**
 - ✓ It will be clear in vv. 10-13 that God is speaking in vv. 6-13 about the choice of His people/nation, but that choice and election of Israel is the same way that God elects individuals to salvation.
 - ✓ *God does not choose all to be His children* (v. 7a). While Isaac was chosen, Ishmael was excluded.
 - ✓ *God actively chooses who will be His children* (v. 7b). Isaac was chosen.
 - ✓ *God’s choice is a decision made in eternity* (v. 7b). The choice of Isaac was made prior to his birth.
 - ✓ *God’s choice is not based on human activity or position* (v. 8). The promise is made prior to anyone doing anything to commend themselves or make themselves “worthy” of a promise.
 - ✓ *God’s choice is received by faith* (v. 8). God is the one who justifies (*regarded*), but that justification is received by faith. Believe that God has acted on your behalf to save you and you will be saved (**4:23-25**). If you are not a Christian, believe in Jesus Christ’s work and you will be saved.
 - ✓ *God’s choice culminates in God’s miraculous work* (v. 9). God alone acts to fulfill His promise. This is the encouragement Paul wants the readers to have — the unbelief of some Israelites does not nullify God’s saving power. God *will* accomplish the fulfillment of all He has promised in salvation. Israel will be saved and all the Gentiles who have been chosen for salvation will also be saved.

- **Is God's choice unfair? (vv. 14ff).**
 - ✓ If God had not acted, no one would have been saved, because no one chooses God.
 - ✓ The real problem is not why He chose some and not others, but why He chose *any* at all.
 - ✓ He chose us; we did not choose Him. "If God had not chosen them, they would never have chosen God." [Eadie]
- **How is this truth a comfort for us?**
 - ✓ *If you have been chosen, you cannot be unchosen.* You are safe. Your salvation is not on the basis of what you have merited. You could never do enough to merit it. But Christ could (and did).
 - ✓ *If you have been chosen you cannot lose your position as God's son.* (If salvation was dependent on you, you would never keep your sonship — "if you could lose your salvation, you would.")
 - ✓ *Our responsibility is not to save anyone; our responsibility is to tell about Christ (10:9ff).*

4. God is Faithful — His Purposes Will STAND (vv. 10-13)

- If the account of Isaac was the only illustration of election in Scripture, that would be enough to prove the point. But it is not the only example, so Paul says, **and not only this....** That is, there is more. God's sovereignty and divine election and choice are also seen in Isaac's wife Rebekah, and Jacob and Esau.
- Similarities and difference between Sarah and Rebekah (v. 10a): they were both barren and they were both promised sons and they both had sons through divine intervention. But Abraham's sons were rivals, from two different women, while Jacob's rival was from the same mother. There *might* have been reason to grant favor to Isaac over Ishmael because of the mothers, but not Jacob over Esau.
- **How God chose Jacob.**
 - ✓ *There was nothing distinctive in the conception of Jacob and Esau.* Paul emphasizes that their conception was by **one man**, Isaac. But Isaac was not all they shared: they shared the same father, the same mother, and the same act of conception. There was nothing distinctive about the start in life — they were positioned identically with no reason to grant favor to one over the other.
 - ✓ *There was nothing in their actions to distinguish Jacob or Esau —*
 - The choice between them was made when **the twins were not yet born**. Because they had not been born when the choice was made, there was nothing they could do to commend themselves; there was nothing about their character that was commendable or condemnable.
 - The choice was made when neither **had done anything good or bad**. They had no accomplishments or detriments that could influence God's choice. There was nothing **bad**, "morally substandard" or "de-based" to deter God from choosing them.
 - The choice was **not because of works** (v. 11d). This is the emphatic statement that has been inferred throughout this section. Election and choice are not merited; Paul is expanding **4:1ff**. The work of man and the call of God are mutually exclusive; one excludes the other.

- ✓ *God's purpose and God's choice alone was the distinguishing act.* The words **so that** emphasize the purpose of the inadequacy of Jacob and Esau to influence God's electing plan. It was so that God would be seen as preeminent and sovereign. It was to emphasize God's superiority and greatness.
 - God chose Jacob to accomplish His **purpose**. God had a plan and intention with the boys and with the nation of Israel, and that purpose could not be thwarted.
 - God chose Jacob as a result of His electing **choice**. The word **choice** is often translated "election." God has selected which of the two would carry forward the Abrahamic promise. For His own purposes — His own personal interest and desire, God chose Jacob (and not Esau). As will be noted in **v. 13**, this choice is an act of love (and grace: **11:5, 28**; cf. also **1 Thess. 1:4**).
 - God chose Jacob by means of His **call** (v. 11d). Paul emphasizes a contrast — *not works, but call*. It was God's effectual, gracious call that chose Jacob. The cause of choosing and fulfillment of the promises was all in God and not at all in the patriarchs. There *is* a cause to salvation, but it is outside the scope of man's ability and wholly in the hands of God, who sovereignly calls (**4:17**).
 - "In the final analysis the reason why some people are accepted and others rejected is that God so willed it. The divine, sovereign will is the source of both election and reprobation. Human *responsibility* is not canceled, but there is no such thing as human *merit*. God's eternal purpose is not ultimately based on human works." [William Hendriksen]
- ✓ *God's purpose and God's choice was unchangeable* — it **would stand** (v. 11c). The word is "abide," "remain." God's purpose is unchanging. It is permanent. It will not fail. Jacob might fail (and he did in many ways), but the promise could not fail because it was dependent on God, not on Jacob. This is hopeful for the Israelite — God's promises to the nation will be fulfilled! — and to us: God's promises of salvation are sure and certain and cannot be overwhelmed by any deficiency of us.
- ✓ From start to finish, everything about our salvation is all of God, and that's what makes it secure. God's promise to Israel has not failed, and His word of promise to us for salvation will not fail.
- **God's choice of Jacob is about the choice of a nation** (v. 12)
 - ✓ Verse 12 is another quotation from the OT — from **Gen. 25:23**, only part of which Paul quotes.
 - ✓ When God says the older would serve the younger, he is talking about the nations and not the boys. In fact, the account in Genesis does not suggest that Esau ever served Jacob (apart from the bowl of stew; but he was not subservient to Jacob in that act).
 - ✓ It is notable that later "Jacob" would gain the name "Israel" and the two were used interchangeably (with the nation at times also being called "Jacob"). Similarly, Esau would be used interchangeably with "Edom," the nation over which he was the head (cf. **Obadiah 1, 6, 8, 10, 21**). And the nation of Edom was definitely subservient to Israel (as Obadiah affirms).
 - ✓ The quote from **Mal. 1:2-3** in v. 13 also affirms that the nations are in view in this section.
 - ✓ The point is that God has chosen Israel to be His people and He was sovereignly directing those nations through their heads and leaders, Jacob and Esau. The source of their futures was in God's decree and plan and purposes. God caused and brought about their futures (just as He does us).

- **What about God's hatred of Esau?** (v. 13) Isn't that unfair?
 - ✓ Some suggest that when it says God hates Esau it simply means that God doesn't love Esau as much as He loves Jacob. That sounds more palatable and reasonable, because **hate** is so harsh.
 - ✓ The problem is that idea does not fit the biblical data.
 - The Scriptures only rarely speak about God hating someone or something.
 - When it does speak of God hating, it speaks of God's hatred of sin and sinners:

- **Deut. 12:31** *"You shall not behave thus toward the LORD your God, for every abominable act which the LORD hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods."*
- **Ps. 11:5** *The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates.*
- **Prov. 6:16-19** *There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.*
- **Is. 61:8** *For I, the LORD, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering...*

- These don't speak of "less love." They speak of hatred as we typically would use it. God detests these things and cannot be partnered with them.
 - God's hatred is actually part of His attribute of wrath and judgment: God's wrath is an expression of His righteous hatred of sin. He must pour out His judgment against sin (1:18).
 - We should also note that Mal. 1:2-3 speaks of God's judgment against Edom; His hatred of Edom results in His judgment against her. He doesn't just "love Edom less;" He *hates* Edom.
 - ✓ Even when God hates sin and sinners, though, there is much expression of grace:
 - He withholds His wrath, waiting for repentance (Rom. 2:4). That He doesn't immediately send sinners to Hell after their first sin is an expression of loving grace.
 - While God did hate Edom, it is also true that God loves and adopts as His children many whom He hates. Every believer in Christ was once the object of God's hatred and wrath (5:8). But His loving grace superseded His hatred and folded us into His family. Why? Because it did (there is no good reason for grace, other than it is an expression of God's grace, which we will see in 9:23).
 - ✓ There is something unfair in v. 13, but it is not unfair that God hates Esau. It is unfair that He loves Jacob (and also us, under a different promise). It's never unfair for God to hate sinners. His hatred of sin and sinners is always just and righteous. It's always amazing grace that God loves sinners.
- **God's choice of Jacob is typical (again) for how He chooses all men for salvation**
 - ✓ *God's choice has nothing to do with spiritual heritage or moral action* (vv. 10-11a). There is nothing commendable in any person that God chooses to be His.
 - ✓ *God's choice is God's choice* (v. 11b). He alone determines who will be His. It's all about Him.
 - ✓ *God's choice is a secure choice* (vv. 11-12). When He chooses, it is unchangeable and unalterable. It was that way for Jacob and Esau, and it will be that way for us as well.

- ✓ *God's choice is in spite of God's right to righteously damn those who are worthy recipients of His hatred and wrath* (v. 13). We could be condemned. We should be condemned. If we are His, we are not condemned and not hated, but loved.
- ✓ *God's choice should produce worship and gratitude for those who are chosen.* Paul is demonstrating how 8:37-39 are true for us. And he is building to another benediction (11:33-36). Let us praise the One who has chosen and saved us in grace.

5. God is Faithful — His Non-Election of Pharaoh is JUST (vv. 14-18) [next week]

CONCLUSION:

There is one more note about the story I told you earlier about Nicholas Winton. While he was working to save those children, he kept a scrapbook with their names, pictures, addresses, and birthdates. Then when the last child was brought to England, he put the scrapbook away. It lay in his home undiscovered for nearly 50 years, until his wife found it in the late 1980s. At her urging, he contacted the BBC to see if they could help find some of those children. The broadcast company did help and broadcast a story about him called "That's Life!" in 1988. The initial broadcast was shown to a live audience, of which Winton was a part. As part of the show, the announcer directed the audience, "Stand up if you owe your life to Nicholas Winton," and every member of the audience stood — he was surrounded by the people he helped to save.

In a telling summary of his life after he died, Vera Egermayer, a survivor of the Terezin camp, said: "Nicky is a national hero here in the Czech Republic. In England you don't know about him but everywhere else we do. He did a kind act and never told anybody."

He never told anybody. That's humble and sweet. And it's also sad. All those people rescued, with none of them knowing for 50 years who to thank.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you have been saved even more dramatically and powerfully than those children in Czechoslovakia. And in His grace, God has not been silent about it. He has told us how He has saved us, and that gives us reason to rest in Him and His provision. He is faithful to keep us in our salvation. And it has given us someone to thank and worship because He has saved us. If you are a believer in Christ, you can be sure of God to keep you; rest in that today. And give Him thanks for this eternal work He has done for you.

BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36