

Promises, Promises

“But you *promised!*”

These are words we've all heard, maybe even spoken. We want to be able to rely on promises made to us, and most of us also want to keep our promises faithfully. But keeping our word is hard. That's probably why Jesus told us to keep it simple - *“Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”* (Matthew 5:37.)

Jesus, being God, knows about promises. This week we will see how God carries out his promise of salvation, and how he chooses those the promise is meant for. This teaching is difficult for some to swallow, but it is not hard to understand. God keeps it simple. *“It does not ... depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.”* (Romans 9:16.) God's mercy - that's where your relationship with him starts. That's a promise.

Monday – Children of the Promise

“Promises, though they be for a time seemingly delayed, cannot be finally frustrated.... the heart of God is not turned though his face be hid.” Timothy Cruso, 17th c. Presbyterian pastor

1. Please read Romans 9:1-9 (focusing on 6-9). Who are God's children?

Text Insight: Paul uses the word “Israel” in two different ways in verse 6. The first refers to Jacob, a man who was also known as Israel. The second refers to the nation of people who descended physically from Jacob.

2. In verses 7-8, Paul writes of Jacob's grandfather, Abraham. What point is Paul making here?

3. Read Genesis 11:26-12:7. How does 12:2-3 help you understand that God's promise to Abraham was not restricted to his own physical children?

Tuesday – Not by Works

“The Christian does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because he loves us.” C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

1. Please read Romans 9:10-13. In this passage we discover that God chose between Jacob and Esau. How would you describe the choice that God made?

Text Insight: In Old Testament times the older son inherited twice as much as the other children, even if they were twins. Esau, as the oldest, would have expected the promise to be fulfilled through him.

2. According to verses 11-12, what was the basis for God's choice of Jacob over Esau? Does it appear to depend at all on some sort of superior merit Jacob had that Esau did not?

3. Jacob acted with cunning and deceit on more than one occasion. For further reading, consider reading Genesis 27:1-36 for a swift narrative of how he dealt with his own brother and father. How does this underscore Paul's point in Romans 9:11-12, that God did not choose Jacob based on Jacob's good works?

Making it Personal: To understand how this grace applies to those of us in Christ, read Ephesians 2:8-10. How does this help you understand God's choice for Jacob? How would you like to respond to God in prayer?

Wednesday – God's Sovereignty

“Divine sovereignty is not the sovereignty of a tyrannical Despot, but the exercised pleasure of One who is infinitely wise and good!” A.W. Pink, The Sovereignty of God

1. Please read Romans 9:14-21. What is the point of verses 14-16?

2. Look again at verse 16. What does this verse say to those who endeavor to earn salvation on their own?

3. Some people have a hard time accepting the truth that it is God's choice to determine who he will shower his grace and mercy upon. What does Paul tell those people in verses 19-21?

Prayer Focus: This is difficult for many to accept, particularly in our Western culture, where we have a strong sense of fairness. Read the opening quote and ask God to fill you with a sense of his wisdom and goodness.

Thursday – Chosen People

“The concept of Israel as the chosen people does not imply a certain divine favoritism, as some seem to think, but an opportunity of grace.” A.R. Tippett, seminary professor and missionary to Fiji

1. Please read Romans 9:22-29. Who will God bring into his family according to verse 24?

2. Paul quotes from the Old Testament to show that salvation is for both Gentiles and Jews. How do verses 25 and 27 support Paul's position?

3. Some people go so far as to think God's plan is wrong. Isaiah addressed that attitude in Isaiah 29:16. How does Isaiah's insight help us to think through matters which we don't understand?

Digging Deeper: Take a look at Matt. 8:5-13. How does this episode reveal Jesus' heart for those beyond Israel?

Friday – Faith, not Works

“We believe, that the work of regeneration, conversion, sanctification and faith, is not an act of man's free will and power, but of the mighty, efficacious and irresistible grace of God.” Charles Spurgeon, 19th c. pastor

1. Please Romans 9:30-33. How is righteousness attained? According to verse 32, was righteousness ever attainable by works? If not, what place do works have in our life of faith?

2. What does Ephesians 2:4-5 and 2:8-9 tell us about attaining salvation? After reading those verses, what would you say to someone who looks down on those who are not Christians?

3. The rock in Romans 9:33 is Jesus. Why do you suppose that Jesus and his life became a stumbling block to the Jews?

Making it Personal: Read John 10:7-11 for reassurance about what Jesus freely offers you.

For the Weekend: Read Romans 9:19-21, Isaiah 45:9-12 and Jeremiah 18:1-12. Consider God's sovereignty and his gracious work in your life. How would you like to respond to him?