

“Israelites”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen. The text for our meditation this morning is the epistle reading, Romans 9:1-5 which reads, “I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. 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. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. So stands God’s Word. Amen.

What a wonderful thing it is to be chosen. To be chosen means a lot. To be chosen often implies something special. To be chosen means that you are wanted, that you are valued over and above something else. When we are children we might have been chosen to play on a team of pickup football or baseball. When we grow just a little older, maybe someone chose us to go out with them. Then as we grow older still maybe someone chose us to spend the rest of their lives with them. Love can be an important part in choosing.

Love has a lot to do with the choosing that we read about in this morning epistle reading. The apostle Paul is talking about his kinsmen. Paul is not entirely happy. In fact he comes right out and speaks about his “great sorrow” and “unceasing anguish.” Paul goes so far to say that he himself would wish to be separated from Christ for the sake of his kinsmen, the people of Israel, the Israelites. Paul is in anguish and great sorrow over their unbelief, their rejection of the promised One, the Messiah, the Christ, their rejection of Jesus. The people of Israel were a

people loved by God, chosen by Him to be His treasured possession. They were chosen to be God's people over and above all the other peoples of the world. Listen to what God said about the choice that He had made. Deuteronomy 7:6-11 reads, "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today."

God Himself considered the Israelites to be His treasured possession. He had chosen them. He had established His covenant with them. He would be their God, and they would be His people. He would provide for them and deliver them from the hands of their enemies. They were only to trust in Him for all good things, to obey Him, and to worship and serve Him only as the only God (which He is) and not turn from Him and worship and serve the false God's of the nations. They had pride in this, pride in being the chosen of the One true God, Yahweh. They had great pride in being able to trace their ancestry back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel). They had, as Paul reminds us here in Romans 9, "to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs."

There were times that they brought this ancestry up, thinking that it truly held some sort of advantage for them. John the Baptist told them in Matthew 3, “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.”

Then too, Jesus Himself in John 8 is speaking to them trying to let them know that mere reliance on ancestry is not what matters. “This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.” Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.”

Paul goes on to say that to the Israelites, “belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.” Just think about that for a minute, they were adopted as God’s children out of all the nations. The covenant was made with them. The Law was given to them on Mt. Sinai. They had the true worship. They had the promises of God. However, instead of worshiping Yahweh and Him alone they chased after other Gods. Instead of obeying God’s Law and loving God and neighbor they tried to use God when they needed Him and mistreat and use their neighbor. Then they forgot the true promise of God, a Savior whose coming would be a blessings for the whole world; but instead believed the Messiah would come for them only, and then only for temporal benefits. So when Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior did come they did not recognize Him and so they rejected Him. Jesus fulfilled all the Old

Testament prophecies and Jesus did signs and wonders that clearly proved that He is God. But, they did not care and saw only what they wanted to see and ignored the truth of God in human flesh bringing the Kingdom of God into their very midst. They rejected the promises that were theirs and so kept themselves out of the Kingdom of God. This has been to our benefit, to the benefit of those of us who are of the nations, the Gentiles. Paul talks about Israel's rejection in Romans 11, "So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!" Indeed, as we are told in 1 Timothy 2:4, "God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

Indeed, Jesus Christ who is the one mediator between God and man. Jesus who is the promised One, descended from the people of Israel according to the flesh, but who is truly the only begotten Son of God. Jesus who shed His blood on the cross so that it would be a cleansing flood to wash away the sins of all people. But, as with the Israelites, people today will out right reject Jesus and the gifts He freely gives. They rely on their ancestry claiming that "my grandparents and parents belonged to this church. They rely on the claim of church membership, similar to how the Israelites relied on having the temple in Jerusalem.

None of those things matter. Your grandparents or parents faith does not benefit you. The fact that your name appears on the membership roll of Hope Lutheran Church in Maryville, or any other congregation does not and will not save you. Certainly, it is important to belong to a church that teaches rightly, where the Word of God, His Law and His Gospel are rightly proclaimed and the Sacraments are rightly administered. But even that is not truly enough. Your

name must be found in the lamb's Book of Life. You must be found in faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and your Lord. You cannot rely on anything or anyone else or on anything that you believe that you have done. Ephesians 2 tells us, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

The Israelites boasted in many things. We boast in many things. But being a true child of Israel does not depend on ancestry or specific church membership. Those of us who are Baptized in Christ and in the Lamb's Book of Life, who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are of the true Israel, the chosen treasured possession of our heavenly Father through Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God that passes all understanding forever keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.