

I remember nine years ago, I did a summer pastoral internship outside of Denison in Western Iowa. My supervisor and I met with other Lutheran pastors on a Tuesday in the fellowship hall under Immanuel Lutheran Church in Schleswig, Iowa to study the upcoming Bible passages for Sunday. I won't forget the pastor's comment about the selected readings for this Sunday. He said, "This maybe is a week where you're better off preaching on the Old Testament or Gospel."

I can relate to that comment. However, I am called to preach to you the whole counsel of God, so here we go. What we can learn today is that **CHRISTIANS ARE SAVED BY GRACE ALONE, THROUGH FAITH ALONE, IN CHRIST ALONE.**

First, **I. All humanity is saved in Christ alone.** Peter is clear in his sermon in the book of Acts "**And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**" Likewise, we see Paul's anguish at the beginning of this chapter. He writes, "**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.**" Paul is referring to the Jews. Paul is saying that he would rather be sent to hell if it meant his Jewish brothers and sisters receive eternal salvation.

He goes on to write, "**But 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."**" What could Paul mean by not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel? What he's saying is that there are two kinds of Israel. There is Israel according to the flesh and spiritual Israel. There are sons of Abraham by the flesh and by faith.

Paul writes in Galatians 3:7 "**Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.**" John the Baptist tells the religious elites, "**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.**"

The New Testament is clear that the promises made by God to Abraham of making him a great nation and that all the people of the earth will be blessed through him—this promise is ultimately fulfilled in Christ and His nation, the Church. Forget your ancestry, you are a son or daughter of Abraham because of your faith in Jesus.

What follows from this is the difficult part. I know this is difficult because I know some of you have Jewish friends or family members. There's a synagogue just down the road from here and perhaps you know some of the people who attend there. We as Christians are called to love all people and wish all well. Violence and antisemitism is unchristian and sinful.

But the truth is that Jews who reject Jesus are the ones who are cut off and accursed as Paul describes in Romans 9. There are some Christians who teach that the Jews are in some way a special covenant people of the Lord. However, this teaching is unbiblical. In so far as they reject Jesus as the Messiah, they have lost that special status. In this way, modern Jews are in the same boat as other religions or beliefs: Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, agnostics, atheists, and the rest.

I know this might sound harsh, but this is part of what we teach when we teach that we are saved in Christ alone. What Paul teaches us here is to look to nobody else but Jesus Christ who came from the Jews to save not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles. All humanity is saved in Christ alone, and that's a promise you can trust.

Next, II. Your salvation is a result of God's grace alone. To be saved by grace means you are saved apart from your works. Perhaps we are familiar with the acrostic G.R.A.C.E.: God's riches at Christ's expense. This is apart from anything you've done.

To highlight this further, Paul discusses the story of Jacob and Esau. As you may know, Jacob and Esau were twins, and Jacob, the younger of the two became the heir instead of Esau. Paul comments, **“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—[their mom] was told, “The older will serve the younger.””**

The Bible teaches, “Predestination, or God's eternal election, extends only to the righteous, God-pleasing children of God. It is a cause of their salvation, which God brings about. He has arranged everything that belongs to it” (FC Ep XI 5). In simple terms, before the universe was created, the Father chose you to receive eternal life apart from anything good in you. He didn't simply foresee that you'd become a Christian. His choice from eternity caused your salvation.

In the 1870s and 1880s, questions on this doctrine split the Lutheran Church in America. The question was whether or not the Lord chose you with view of your faith in mind. Interestingly enough, an important meeting between Lutherans on June 9, 1882 in La Crosse, Wisconsin helped solidify and clarify the teachings.

This doesn't mean that God chose certain people for eternal damnation. Those who are not saved ultimately are not saved due to their persistent rejection of God's Word and His means of grace. I understand this might be confusing, but stick with me here!

This doctrine of election is taught throughout Scripture with Romans 9 simply being one place among many. What this tells us that we didn't choose God, but God chose us. We don't believe in a personal decision for Jesus Christ like some Church bodies teach. According to our sinful nature we are lost and would

never choose this life of following Jesus. It was God who rescued us from our futile ways, and this plan was in place before the Earth was formed.

This gives us some humility because the doctrine of election teaches us that it's not because we're better than our unbelieving neighbor or that individual Christians are somehow more special than modern Jews. It's not that God loves some but hates others. Your salvation is simply a gift, it is simply grace.

The trick is that we don't know who God has chosen, and who he hasn't until the end. Paul laments about the Jews saying, **“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.”** Paul's shock is that despite the Jews having all the advantages, many of them did not go on to believe in the Savior. Many people growing up as Christians will have been raised with all the advantages of the Word and Sacrament, but will sadly reject Jesus.

Conversely there are Jews, Muslims, atheists, and agnostics, whom the Holy Spirit will later bring to faith, whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Paul's surprise was that the Gentiles were grafted into the Church through their faith in Christ. Our calling and election is made clear through the faith which receives the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the law, the worship, and the promises.

III. You find assurance through trusting God's Gifts. Yes, we saved by grace alone, your eternal salvation was secured from before the foundation of the world apart from anything you've done. It's in Christ alone, so accept no substitutes.

Yet the doctrine of election drives us not to delve into the secret hidden counsel of God, but to go to the source of God's grace, namely, the Word and Sacrament.

Isaiah encourages us today writing, **“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”** I am glad you're here this day. This day and from this day on, keep on coming to the waters, that is, by confessing and hearing your sins absolved, you return to the baptismal waters in which you were once washed. You receive again that which was won for you on Calvary.

Keep on hearing God's Word preached, taught, and read, even as you do that daily in your homes because through it you receive assurance and reminder that Christ has written your name in His book of Life. Have your prayers arise before God. Receive Christ's true body and blood to grant you forgiveness.

And rejoice, there is hope for your unbelieving friend, neighbor, or relative. Share with them this good news that you are saved **GRACE ALONE, THROUGH FAITH ALONE, IN CHRIST ALONE.** Lord willing, they too will believe!