

The Commission of Election

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If you'll recall, last week we spent the morning in Romans 1-9. Setting up the letter walking through chapters 1-8, taking a 10,000ft view of Paul's purpose in dissecting the gospel and it's myriad of wonderful implications for the Christian, like adoption, justification, and eternity. We then concluded by walking through chapter 9, getting a window into the heart of Paul, and his hope amidst a problem he encountered. A problem all Christians encounter as we put faith in Jesus. The problem of unbelief in those close to us.

We saw Paul's heart of sorrow for the lost souls of his people, and his hope in the good sovereignty of God, giving voice to the doctrine of election as a comfort for the suffering of loved ones who reject Jesus. He had hope not in the frail and weak efforts of a broken humanity but in God to save. His hope wasn't in his ability to argue, convince or even preach, but in the perfect, good love of a God that would choose to redeem despite our depth of sin.

If you were with us last week, you were undoubtedly left with questions, concerns, and even objections. As we didn't delve into really any of the questions we have about the doctrine of election and how that relates to our responsibility as human beings with agency and choice. Rest assured, that on the heels of a hard discussion last week, hard for our minds, and hard for our hearts, we will make an effort to follow up on one of the harder questions we have about the election. What do we do? Or what should we do? With Romans 9 being true, regardless of how hard it is to wrap our minds around, if it is true, what do we do with it? Should we do anything with it other than trust the Lord more deeply and find comfort in his good mercies.

Last week we walked away with little application by way of doing. Rather the aim of our text and sermon last week was to shape our thoughts and beliefs about God, that our hearts, affections and emotions might be stirred to respond differently. Respond differently to the reality of lost souls in and around our lives. The application was entirely internal. But a really neat aspect of believing right things about God, the gospel and ourselves, is how it does shape our doing. And that is exactly what Paul is going to write to us this morning. What we now do.

That is the aim of our time this morning. What do we do with this doctrine and this truth? How does believing the truth of Romans 9 change how I interact with my kids, or my co-workers, or my classmates? What does this mean for me as I go about my day this week?

This is what we will see this morning in Paul's response to the same problem of unbelief we saw last week. **The Christians responsibility is an output in faith, not an outcome of works.** There is a temptation for the Christian to be lazy. When the doctrine of election and the sovereignty of God take root in us, and we do really trust that it is God who saves, not our effort for ourselves, or our effort for anyone else, it wouldn't be unreasonable to think we have little or even no role to play in the work of the gospel. If God's got it, then why not just pursue a hobby instead? Why not let God handle salvation and I'll take care of my family. Let God handle the big things, and I'll take care of my future.

The problem with that is all of chapter 10, and that is what we are going to see this morning. Paul's resolution to the problem of lost souls is two part: the sovereignty of God, and the will of man. Because the problem of unbelief exists in two parts: the sovereignty of God and the will of man.

Last week we dealt with the first part, the Sovereignty of God. We (and Paul) came to the conclusion of faith, trust and comfort that God is God, and I am not. That is a good thing, a great and glorious thing when seen through the lens of all that we have in the gospel. That the antidote to the anguished broken heart for unbelief is trust and rest in the beauty of the Sovereignty of God. That God would choose to love fools and weak things like us. Like Paul.

And yet, the second part of that problem is the responsibility of man, not only in faith, but also in our response to faith. What follows faith is as tied to faith itself and salvation is. The result of faith isn't only the freedom of an eternal inheritance, nor is it merely obedience and holiness (which Paul would expand upon from Chapter 12-16 of Romans), but also in the commission of the Christian to participate in the salvation of the lost through the means God has sovereignly ordained. In other words, the role we play as tools in God's hands, regarding the salvation of those we love. **1. Faithful Prayer 2. Preaching Faith in Jesus 3. Sending the Faithful**

It's telling, verse 1 of chapter 10. How Paul himself responds to the idea of a Sovereign God, and how he knows we will respond to it. Look how he continues the letter **Romans 10:1**. Once again we see Paul's heart. Bookending chapter 9 is Paul's heart. First in **Romans 9:1-4**. His heart is broken at the realization and the reality that everything he has in Christ in the gospel, his brothers and sisters don't. Those he's been closest to in his life stand apart from God's grace without hope. And we see here, in chapter 10:1, Paul's heart again. A longing that those very people might know Jesus. In other words, hope.

He expresses sadness, sorrow, this deep anguish as their state of being lost, and yet ends with hope in his heart that would not always be the case. What is different between sorrow and hope? What we looked at last week. God's sovereign will.

Paul knows that no matter how obstinate, no matter how rebellious, no matter how resentful, no matter how deeply rooted Israel's commitment to opposing Jesus is, there is no one person outside the purview of the will of God. Including the very people that rejected Jesus as he was on earth! It's a story we see in microcosms throughout the OT. Israel needing deliverance -- God delivering -- Israel rejecting God -- Needing deliverance again.

For further evidence of God's mercy on the most rebellious, we need look no further than the author himself. Look with me at **Philippians 3:4-6**. A zealous determination that no matter what, Paul could become the best pharisee, the most committed, and at the end of the day, no could claim more of a right to the pleasure of God than he. Because he worked harder. Obeyed better. Said and did all the right things.

These words of Paul in the first part of chapter 10 aren't a callus indictment of contempt toward a failure of a people. They're Paul looking in the mirror and seeing himself and having a sorrow that

knows the depths of hopelessness that results in a life lived trying to earn the grace of God. It's a heart of love and compassion that can feel their lostness because apart from God revealing himself to Paul on the road to Damascus, he'd be right there with them.

Paul knows that the outcome of the state of their souls are not in his hands. But he also knows he can do something. There can be a holy and glorious output, flowing from his hands, his heart, and this case, his pen and his prayers. **Romans 10:1-4**

The first output that Paul puts forth, **1. Prayer**. The question is begged here in light of our text last week: Why pray? Why pray if God is in control, and will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and harden whom he will harden? Aside from the fact that we are commanded to pray, by Jesus several times, in the book of James, Paul in each of his letters including here. I know we were told to pray by God. But if God is sovereign, and no molecule, thought or misplaced pen stroke is outside the realm of his rule, what need is there for us to make our requests known to him?

Well I'll give you two reasons, both from the text of Romans. First, prayer is part of our communication with God. Prayer is part of the Christians relationship with Jesus. Remember back to last week and **Romans 8:15-16**. A deep component of that relationship is speaking to God. Sharing our heart with him in prayer. Knowing God through his word, and responding in prayer that we might be known by him. For the Christian prayer is not an 8 ball, a lottery ticket or a suggestion box. Prayer begins as an intimate relational approach to God's holy throne. Regardless of the effect of our prayer, regardless of any questions we ask regarding its efficacy, it is communion with our saviour and King.

When Jesus was in the garden, preparing to endure his beatings, his suffering, his execution on a block of wood, what did he do? He prayed. He prayed to his father. That recorded prayer is a window into the relationship that all Christians now have, that the adoption into the family of God is our new reality. **Matthew 26:36-39**.

In his most troubled and most anguished moment, Jesus approached the father and asked for something. Brothers and sisters, we get that! We get to approach God almighty just like Jesus. Before Jesus, the people of Israel would need priests to approach God on their behalf. There was no relationship between the individual and God, at least not compared to what we can have through prayer. When Jesus died and the veil was torn, so was the veil between the sinner and God. Allowing all who would call him Abba Father to also approach him in not only our most troubled and anguished moments, but every moment.

Prayer is relational communion with our Father. There is a closeness we get to experience through prayer. Through Supplication, as the Westminster confession says, offering up our desires to the Lord. Through confession, something we do individually as well as corporately. Part of our liturgical rotation here at church is confession through prayer. Offering to God acknowledgement of sin in hearts, as a means to conform more wholly to his commands in his very presence. There are depths to prayer we aren't going to mine here, but it goes so far beyond asking God for things. It is relational communion with our Father.

Second, Prayer shapes our posture. The very act of prayer is submission to God. It is an acknowledgement that we need God, or else we wouldn't be there. Even Jesus in the garden approaches his Father in a moment of need. And yet look at the content of what is contained in that moment of need. **Matthew 26:39**. Even in asking God to relent his wrath, Jesus himself qualifies his request with trust in God's will over his own. Thy will be done, not mine. Knowing what awaits him on the cross, Jesus still prays for the will of his Father to be fulfilled.

This is also tied to our communion and relationship with the Lord. **Psalm 37:3-6**. The verse we all remember here is verse 4. But notice what it is saying altogether? Not, pray and all your hopes and dreams will come true. What we are given here is nothing less than total conformity to the heart and holiness of God. If we are trusting in the Lord, doing good to his glory, faithful to obey and honor him, delighting ourselves not in the things of this world but in his joy, committed to his ways and not ours, our hearts desire will be for the will and glory of God. Just like Jesus in the garden. Prayer then serves to shape us as Christians into a posture that would pray, even in the hardest most anxious moments, not my will be done, but thy will be done. It is not God conforming to the heart and will of man, it is us conforming to the heart and will of God.

Paul then prays for their souls. Knowing all that he does about the will of God and the sovereignty of his rule, Paul still prays. The first reason we can know, that the doctrine of election and God's sovereignty doesn't mean sit on your hands and do nothing, is because the first thing that Paul does immediately after. The humble and relational *act* of prayer.

Brother and sisters pray without ceasing. For your good, God's glory and the salvation of the lost that burden you. Pray that your hearts might be buoyed by the emotional and psychological freedom of trusting in the Lord with what is most burdensome. The soul state of your friends and family.

Every single night we pray with our three year old. Every single night I ask God to save her soul. My thoughts have drifted into the dark places of what ifs and maybes and hopes and plans and strategies, what might I someday do, what might I someday say, to persuade her to trust in no other but Jesus. But in that prayer, it is only God who can save. It is only by his mercy and grace and kindness that Harper might be adopted as I have been. And with everything God overcame in my soul, in Paul's wretched soul, without a doubt God can overcome anything in her soul.

So we, like Paul, desire their salvation. We pray without ceasing. We posture our hearts as humbly submissive to the Lord. Bending our will to his. Knowing that he is wiser. Know that he is kinder. Knowing that that he is more merciful and gracious and glorious than I. So we pray.

The second output of Paul is him **3. Preaching Faith in Jesus**. This is the second output of Paul in our text this morning. The second thing he actually does with the truth of a Sovereign God and a responsible people. **Romans 10:5-13**. This is the same drum that Paul has been beating since chapter 3, righteousness through faith not the works. Righteousness through faith in the work of Christ, not efforts to please God and keep the law. This tension is constant for Paul and for the NT Christians. And he beats this drum by preaching to the Romans...over and over and over again. Constantly teaching what law-keeping has not and cannot do, Jesus did.

In part we can attribute that redundancy to the culture inside the church at Rome. This church was actually more than likely made up of equal parts Gentiles and equal parts Jews. Jewish Christians displaced by persecution or converted by the preached fulfillment of Jesus as the New Covenant, and Roman Christians likely brought into the early church by many of those displaced and newly converted Jews. And in both the polytheistic Roman culture, and the law-keeping atonement religious culture of Israel, there was an assumed effort of pleasing and appeasing.

And for these Jews, Jesus changed everything in fulfilling the righteous requirement of the law, to earn life and justification before God. There most certainly must've been a temptation to revert to the religious practices of the old covenants, as Paul speaks to this tension between law and faith in every single one of his letters to churches. Romans more so than any other.

But I want you to notice something here, something threaded through Romans 9, 10, and 11. If you have your Bible, just take a peek back at Romans 9, notice the quotations and references Paul makes of the OT...of the Law.

Romans 10:5 is a quotation of Moses from Leviticus 18, and Romans 10:6-8 is a quotation of Moses from Deuteronomy 30. What are his conclusions about these two passages from the books of the law as regards life, justification and salvation? **Romans 10:9-13**. The law itself speaks to the veracity of faith in Jesus righteousness over their own. The law itself speaks to justification by faith alone in Christ alone. The law itself speaks to the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Greek as null before the gospel of Jesus and faith in his name.

Paul is preaching and persuading. Paul is making an argument based in the very texts of revelation "they" hold to. The very revelation they cling to as source material for their rejection of Jesus righteousness in favour of their own, is the very source material that reasonably, logically, and prophetically leads to in Jesus.

And not just preaching truth, but preaching gospel truth in context to the hearer. That the authority that they rely on to reject Jesus might ultimately undermine the rejection and be turned to faith. If we are to follow Paul like Paul follows Jesus, then we too must preach word of Christ. And preach the word of Christ in context.

For Paul the doctrine of election led him to the conclusion that he should pray and preach. That he should do something. That he should participate in the glorious work that God is doing in Rome and Galatia and Samaria and Spain and all over the globe. Paul's life at this point is given to preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus. Not sitting on his hands. Not in a million years would the doctrine of election lead Paul into isolation or complacency. Rather he does. He works. He responds. He prays and he preaches.

He prays and preaches faith. Faith in what? Faith in the blood and work of Jesus to save. It's so perfectly placed right here. These iconic verses we've all seen on artistic signs, t-shirts, and tattoos. These verses on faith. Because it takes faith not just for salvation, but for life. For the suffering and anxiety of life. The unknowns and mysteries of God. It takes faith in the sorrow and anguish of lost love ones. It takes faith to reconcile a sovereign God and a responsible people.

This will be the best answer I think I will personally ever have. The best answer for what that divine conjunction is between the Sovereign will of a God who chooses and the free choice of man who is responsible for himself: I don't know. The truth is, I have no earthly idea how that paradox exists. Neither does any theologian or Pastor or minister. I don't know how two seemingly contradictory realities can simultaneously exist. I don't know. I also don't know how Jesus in his incarnation can be fully God and fully man. Doesn't make sense. I also don't know how one God can exist in three persons: the Father, Son, and Spirit. Again, we could make a list of these realities that are true, yet that we cannot reason or reconcile.

But I can have faith. I can know something for certain. I can know Jesus. I can know his death, burial and resurrection means I get life, and justification, and adoption, and an inheritance, and an eternity. As I stand atop Logan's pass, I can know that the God who made all of this with words, is probably wiser, more intelligent, and more complex than I am. And if something doesn't make sense to my small pea sized brain, then that's probably a good thing. Because if it did, well God wouldn't be perfect and infinite if this fallen finite creature could comprehend the majesty and mystery of the universe.

The greatest comfort I have regarding the doctrine of election is not that I can explain the nuances or have answers for all my own questions, but that I can't. Because if I can have resurrecting faith. Faith that God would raise Jesus from death, defying all known laws of the universe since day one post Eden, then of course I can faith that God is more complex than I could ever explain. And like Paul, can have faith that God is sovereign, and good and merciful in his sovereignty, and yet that humanity is responsible to either reject Jesus or receive his gospel in faith.

And like Paul, we can move forward with good works in faith. **Ephesians 2:8-10**. Again there is output by Paul. An output of good works. Not to earn righteousness and justification but because it already was earned. Paul responded by doing. Doing with faithful prayer, in faithful preaching, and in our final section this morning, **3. Sending the faithful**. Sending the Christians in Rome, the Church, sending Christians everywhere to bring the word of Christ. **Romans 10:14-17**.

There are kind of two facets to this passage, first there is the descriptive facet. This is Paul describing the means and mechanisms by which people hear, believe and have faith. The means by which one might arrive at the point of confessing with their mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believing in their heart that God raised him from the dead. The means by which Paul describes here is sending. Commissioning Christians to take the gospel with them and preach Christ crucified to their loved ones, their friends and family.

God could have given his people nothing to do. God could have decided to make the means of gospel faith "eureka" moments. Zapping into our brains and hearts saving faith. Epiphanies while reading a philosophy or history. An 'ah ha' standing on a forested mountaintop with a bow. Or something else that requires no participation by believers. But he didn't.

The means by which God in his sovereignty ordained for the gospel to reach Rome was by Christians bringing it there. The means by which God has ordained for the gospel to reach the ends of the earth in every tongue and every tribe is the commissioning of Christians to carry it on their tongue wherever we go.

And what a privilege! What a privilege that God would choose what is weak and foolish in the world, not only as his people, not only to love us, but that he would choose what is weak and foolish in the world to shame the wisdom of philosophical genius, to shame the might of nations by making salvation not dependent on intelligence or power or strength or wealth but dependent only on faith! A faith carried to the ends of the earth by nobodies! What an honor that God would choose a fool like me to preach the revealed word of God on campus. Or this moment now. What an honor that God would trust Jessalynn and I with Harper and Sophia, to raise them in counsel of Lord. In our parenting, in our marriage, in our home proclaiming the gospel of grace.

Paul's final response to the problem of unbelief is sending and commissioning all Christians to be megaphones and neon signs proclaiming and pointing to the glory of the gospel in the risen Jesus as salvation and hope for all people.

With that we have a commission to go. A call to output. With Romans 1-9 framed rightly, we should be pumped! We should be inspired! We should be jacked that we get to go and tell. That we get to participate in the work of God, not only on behalf of our own obedience in holiness, but we get to participate in the salvation and justification of God's people!

It's clear in scripture that we have a responsibility for ourselves. That we are responsible for our sin, our obedience and our righteousness. But by God's grace our responsibility is not our hope, Jesus is. Once we've been saved, every Christian is given the responsibility of evangelism. **Romans 10:17. Matthew 28:18-20.** Faith through hearing, hearing through the word of Christ.

Just like Paul preached truth in context for Jews, quoting and quoting the OT scripture of them, the fulfillment of Jesus of the law, every believer is commissioned to preach the word of Christ in context.

It is not faithful or helpful for that matter, to disseminate truth and gospel absent relational and cultural context. The hard reality of this is that in this room, in this city, in this county and the bitterroot there are dozens if not hundreds of cultures and subcultures. So to say formulaically preach Jesus this specific way to your friends and family isn't helpful. Moreover every person is arriving at those gospel moments with their own experiences and stories.

Which is why this call to preach is not only for Paul and Peter and pastors and missionaries, but for every Christian everywhere. No one method, or diagram, is sufficient to codify as standard operating procedure. The constant is faith and gospel. But the variables are nearly infinite. Which is why the call to evangelism is for all believers everywhere. No one sermon on a Sunday morning, no one Piper book, no one song is heard and received by everyone the same.

The commission for us this morning is for Montanans and missoulions to bring the word of Christ to missoulions and montanans. Wherever you are. Beating the same drum of the gospel Paul does: Faith in the risen Christ.

Finally, a word of both caution and encouragement. Go all the way back to verse 1 with me. **Romans 10:1.** Remember this precedes Paul's responsibility, it doesn't follow it. In other words, something

changed 9:1-2 and 10:1. Earlier Paul's heart was broken, in sorrow, saddened by his people's unbelieving state. And now, we feel a hopeful optimism that there is a version of this story where they stand saved before God and not condemned. What changed? Not his output. Not his prayer, not his preaching, and not his commissioning. Not his effort to convince, argue or reason with them using the law of Moses. What changed was the emphasis of God's sovereign rule.

With the way we think, the hope and comfort should come after we've done all we can. Where we can rest in our effort. In our world the hope would have come after the beautiful feet of those who bring good news. But hope follows truth, and our works follow both. If you get that mixed up, your gonna rely on yourself when you should rely on the Lord. Your going to think too much of your cleverness or stupidity. You're going to attribute saving faith to your words, not the Spirit of God. You're going to attribute unbelief as an indictment of your own effort, blaming yourself for someone else's lack of faith. Thinking 'what if you had done something more or said something different.'

The word of caution: don't find hope in your effort. The word of encouragement: don't find hope in your effort. It is God who saves, who wills and works, who has mercy. Yet how honoured are we that he has willed to work through us weak and foolish creatures. We are all responsible for our output, but we will never be responsible for the outcome. Only God can be.