

Isaiah 28

Israel has not wanted to hear the word of the LORD (v9-12),
and so therefore the word of the LORD will destroy them (v13).
Israel has made a covenant with death (v15).

Isaiah is referring to the fact that Judah had made alliances with foreign nations,
trusting in the nations to protect them,
rather than trust in the LORD.

And so Isaiah says that the Lord GOD
is laying a foundation in Zion, a precious cornerstone, that will overcome death.

But this is only a good thing for those who believe!
It is a *problem* for those who have made a covenant with death!

And so Isaiah goes on to say that the word of the LORD will be “sheer terror” for them.

In other words, within God’s own chosen people – the people of Jerusalem –
there are those who trust in the nations, and not in the LORD.

And so Isaiah says that the LORD will rise up as on Mt Perazim
(as when God destroyed the Philistines)
and as in the Valley of Gibeon (when God overthrew the Canaanites).

But Perazim and Gibeon are connected by another story –
the story in 2 Samuel 5 of King David’s first great victory.
In the same place where God gave David his first victory,
God will now work his mighty deeds:

only this time, his deed is a “strange deed,”
his work is an “alien work” –
because this time he is overthrowing his own people.

In Psalm 74, we sing of this “alien work.”

“O God, why do you cast us off forever?”

What is God’s purpose in election?

What is God’s purpose in choosing some of his own people to be destroyed?

Why would God create some people only to destroy them?

Sing Psalm 74

Did Psalm 74 answer the question?

Not really.

But Psalm 74 pointed us in the right direction:

“God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.”

Psalm 74 remembers that God is God and we are not,

and so therefore God has his purposes –

whether we understand them or not.

And Psalm 74 asks God to “have regard for the covenant.”

“Arise, O God, defend your cause.”

Asaph understands that the reason why God should arise and *do something*

is not because I am so important.

The reason why God should arise and do something

is because *his name*, his cause, is important.

But the explanation of *why* God has this “alien work” of destroying the wicked –

even of destroying the wicked among his own people –

is found in our New Testament lesson.

Read Romans 9:14-10:4

1. God’s Purpose in Election:

Paul speaks boldly in Romans 8 of how *nothing* can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

As we have seen, this raises a problem – a difficulty that Paul is very conscious of:

What about Israel?

Didn’t God choose Israel?

Paul, you are saying that *nothing* can separate God’s chosen people from his love.

But God chose Israel – and yet *plainly* something *has* separated them from God’s love!

Because while many Jews have believed,

most have not.

How can you say, Paul, that nothing can separate us from the love of God,

when God has obviously rejected the majority of *his people!*

Romans 9 is Paul’s answer to that question.

In verses 6-13 Paul shows from the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,

that election is based on God’s call – not our works.

There is no guarantee based on physical descent.

Abraham had eight sons,

but only one was the child of the promise.

Isaac had twin sons –

but before they were born, God chose Jacob and rejected Esau.

Paul understands that this will shock some,
and so he asks, “is God unjust?”

Is it fair for God to choose one twin and reject the other?
In verses 14-18 Paul shows from the Exodus
that election is based in God’s mercy – not our efforts.
And Paul says clearly that God hardens some, and has mercy on others.

Of course, Paul understands that this doesn’t make it any easier!

You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”
You might think that Paul would try to help his readers.
But he refuses to soften the blow.

*But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?
Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?”
Has the potter no right over the clay,
to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use
and another for dishonorable use?*

God is sovereign.

He does with his creation what he has determined.
And so Paul demonstrates from Hosea and Isaiah
that God’s purpose for Israel was only to save a remnant.
God has made known the riches of his glory to the vessels of his mercy
prepared beforehand for glory –
both from the Jews and the Gentiles.
But he has endured with patience the vessels of wrath
prepared for destruction.

And so now, starting in 9:30, Paul explains how this all fits together.

2. Attaining Righteousness By Faith vs. Seeking Righteousness By Law (9:30-33)

And not surprisingly, Paul opens this explanation with his favorite phrase:

What then shall we say?

As throughout Romans, this phrase signals a new train of thought.
What then shall we say?

We should say,

*That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it,
that is, a righteousness that is by faith;
but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness
did not succeed in reaching that law. (v30-31)*

The simple reason why God has hardened Israel is for the sake of the Gentiles.
God’s purpose was to harden Israel in order to bring the Gentiles to himself.

There are two questions we should ask here:

What does it mean that the Gentiles did not pursue righteousness?
And what does it mean that Israel pursued a “law of righteousness”?

As we saw earlier in Romans 3-4,

“righteousness” is not just about doing what is right.

Righteousness has to do with God’s justice in the salvation of sinners.

The Gentiles did not pursue righteousness.

They were not looking for salvation.

And Israel pursued a “law of righteousness.”

The ESV says “a law that would lead to righteousness” –
which is not a bad way of putting it.

Because the law does lead to righteousness.

Why do I say that?

How can I say that the law leads to righteousness?

Because *Christ* is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

The *law* leads to Christ.

Christ is our righteousness,

therefore it is accurate to say that the law leads to righteousness!

The problem with Israel is not that they pursued a law that would lead to righteousness.

The problem with Israel is that they did not reach that law.

Why?

Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.

They have stumbled over the stumbling stone.

They stumbled over Jesus.

This is made clear in verse 33, where Paul blends together Isaiah 8 and Isaiah 28
as it is written,

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

Isaiah 28 uses the language of laying in Zion a stone – but there it was a precious cornerstone.

But Isaiah 8:14 is where Paul gets the language of the stone of stumbling.

Isaiah 8:14 says that “he” (the LORD)

*will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling
to both houses of Israel,*

a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

And many shall stumble on it.

They shall fall and be broken;

they shall be snared and taken.

Paul realizes that the ‘precious cornerstone’ of Isaiah 28
is nothing else but the stumbling stone of Isaiah 8.

After all, the stumbling stone of Isaiah 8 is also called “a sanctuary.”

And our Lord Jesus Christ is both the cornerstone of the sanctuary
as well as the rock of stumbling that Israel trips over.

And so Paul says that Israel has not arrived at the law of righteousness,
because they tripped over Jesus.

They pursued a law that did lead to righteousness.
But as they pursued this law,
they stumbled over Jesus because they did not believe in him.

And since Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes,
the only proper way to seek righteousness is by faith.

3. Submitting to the Righteousness of God vs. Establishing Their Own Righteousness (10:1-3)

In verses 1-3 of chapter 10

Paul explains this another way.

And he starts by saying that he has nothing personal against Israel:

*Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.
For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.*

Israel has zeal for God.
Paul himself, as a leader of the Pharisees, had had zeal for God.
But that zeal was not according to knowledge.

You have all, no doubt, seen someone who has zeal without knowledge.
It often happens to people who have just come to embrace reformed theology.
They are so excited about their new understanding,
that they spout off at the mouth and alienate friends and relatives!
They have zeal – but not according to knowledge.
They don't *really* understand what they are saying.

Paul is saying that Israel has zeal for God,
but if their zeal was rooted in true knowledge,
then they would not have stumbled over Jesus.

They would have seen the cornerstone for who he was!
The cornerstone! The sanctuary! The end of the law for righteousness!

*For, being ignorant of [or, since the verb is an active verb, “ignoring”]
the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own,
they did not submit to God's righteousness. (10:1-3)*

Israel did not understand the righteousness of God.
Why does Paul say this?

Because the righteousness of God is not an abstract doctrine.
The righteousness of God is not simply the doctrine that God is just.
The righteousness of God refers to how he is just *and* the justifier of the ungodly.

The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel.

We return to the basic theme that Paul opened Romans with:

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation
to everyone who believes,
to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in it – in the gospel –
the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.” (1:16-17)

In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed.
And what is the gospel?

“The gospel...concerning his Son,
who was descended from David according to the flesh
and was declared to be the Son of God in power
according to the Spirit of holiness
by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1:3-4)

In the gospel, we see the righteousness of God.

Or to say it another way:

In the death and resurrection of Jesus, we see the righteousness of God.

But Israel has ignored the righteousness of God.

Yes, in one sense they are ignorant.

But their ignorance is willful.

They have ignored the righteousness of God
revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus,
and instead they have sought to establish their own righteousness.

But by now it should be clear:

you cannot establish your own righteousness.

You must submit to God's righteousness.

Conclusion: “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (10:4)

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

He is the purpose of the law.

He is that which the law points to.

We often talk about Christ-centered preaching,
and how the whole OT is about him.

Well, instead of Christocentric,
perhaps we should use the word “Christo-telic”
because Christ is the “telos” -- the end -- of the law.

The law was given to lead to righteousness – that is true!

But the righteousness that the law leads to
is not *our own* righteousness.

As Paul will say in the next verse

“the righteousness based on the law” says

“the person who does the commandments shall live by them,”
but the righteousness based on faith looks to Jesus.

“For with the heart one believes and is justified,
and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”

You will never be able to establish your own righteousness through your own effort.

You must submit to the righteousness of God –

the righteousness that is revealed in the gospel of Christ,
as you humble yourself before God and acknowledge that you are a sinner,
and that you have no hope for righteousness based on your own works.

We like to think that we are okay – that we are good enough.

But Paul says that if you pursue righteousness by the law – by your own works—
then you will not reach it.

But if you believe on Christ, and call upon his name, you will be saved.

It is because of this message that we come to the baptism of Anna Sophia Bent.

We know that Sophie is not righteous before God.

She cannot establish her own righteousness.

And so we bring her to Jesus.

And we pray that she too would confess with her mouth that Jesus is Lord,
and believe with her heart that God raised him from the dead.