

Romans 15:8-13 Reason to Rejoice

In the first section of chapter 15 we were told to bear with the failings of the weak, and welcome one another. The basis of all this is the example of Christ; we are to welcome one another just as He has welcomed us. It is because of His grace that we have hope, regardless of our past. Now we look again at Christ's example, and the joy we have because of Him. There are three specific things Christ has done which are detailed here by Paul, and they are all results of one key aspect of His life.

"For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised..." This is the key that we start with. Christ became a servant. Let's take a quick tour of this title of Christ, which has its foundations in Isaiah's prophecy.

Is 42:1 "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations." This passage goes on to say (v. 6) "I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations..." The Servant wasn't just for the covenant people of Israel, but He was to bring justice and light to the nations – those outside the covenant of promise.

Is 49:6 "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Again, God indicates that the Servant's work would bring light and salvation to the nations.

Is 52:13 "Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted." Though the language here seems to point out a glorified status of the Servant, the very next verses say that his appearance was to be marred beyond human semblance. The New Testament takes this as foretelling the horrible crucifixion of Christ – He was brutally beaten and then lifted up on a cross – and because of that shameful death He was then highly exalted by the Father. In this context once again, we see in v. 15 "so shall he sprinkle many nations." His salvation was extended to the Gentiles.

The suffering of the Messiah carries through into ch. 53, describing how He would be pierced, crushed, cut off for the transgression of the people. Is 53:11 "Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities." Again we have the clue that His salvation was for "many" people – not just the covenant people of Israel.

Jesus, the Lord of Glory, the eternal Son of God, humbled Himself as a servant to His own people, becoming a light to the nations. Why would He do this? Now we get to the three reasons, or the three things He accomplished. First, it was "to show God's truthfulness..." The NASB says Christ became a servant "on behalf of the truth of God." In what way did His suffering and death show God's truthfulness? First of all, by fulfilling the very things which were foretold by the prophets. God had spoken in the past, as v. 4 reminded us, and those prophecies had given hope to the people back when they were given. However, what if they had never been fulfilled? Would we today have reason to put our hope and trust in God? Without the fulfillment of His promises, we might justly come to the conclusion that God is all talk and no action. Instead, we can say with Joshua (23:14), "you know in you hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed."

Truth is a characteristic of God. Psalm 119:160 says “The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.” Isaiah 45:19 “I the Lord speak the truth; I declare what is right.” Isaiah 65:16 calls Him “the God of truth.” Truth is something that is solid, valid, binding – it does not change, and is not subject to circumstances. Christ came to bear witness of the truth, to reveal the unchanging character and promises of God.

Secondly, Jesus came “in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.” To confirm is to establish or validate. What did God promise to Abraham? “Look toward the heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them...so shall your offspring be.” (Gen 15:5) “In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” (Gen 22:18) Jesus came to bring salvation not only to Abraham’s descendants, but to all peoples of the earth. Promise confirmed. What did God promise to Jacob? As Jacob was dying, he prophetically blessed his children, and declared, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” (Gen 49:10) This indicates that the tribe of Judah would be the tribe of kings, that Messiah would be from the tribe of Judah, and He will bring the nations under His authority. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, the lineage of King David, and extended His salvation to the Gentiles. Promise confirmed.

Thirdly, Jesus came in order that “the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.” In connection with this, Paul quotes several OT passages: “As it is written (2 Sam 22:50), ‘Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.’ And again it is said (Deut 32:43), ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.’ And again (Ps 117:1), ‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.’ And again Isaiah says (Is 11:1), ‘The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.’” We find in the gospels that Jesus welcomed the faith of the Roman centurion and the Syrophenician woman. In the book of Acts, God revealed to the apostles that His offer of salvation was to be extended to the Gentiles, and Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles. You and I are the beneficiaries of this, and as such, we glorify God for His mercy.

No matter who we are, Jew or Gentile, societal outcast or the toast of the town, God has made His salvation available to us through Jesus Christ. There is no sin He cannot forgive, no sinner He will not receive if we come to Him in repentance and faith. He has promised, and we can confidently rest in that promise. This gives us hope, joy, and peace as we believe His Word of truth, and we are able to rejoice in the hope of eternal life with Him.