

This Sunday's texts:

[Isaiah 55:1-5](#)

[Romans 9:1-5](#)

[Matthew 14:13-21](#)

## **Fulfilled in Christ**

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**August 6, 2023**

Her Gospel reading for today is from the gospel of Matthew chapter 14 starting in the 13th verse:

<sup>13</sup>When Jesus heard what had happened, He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed Him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup>When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick. <sup>15</sup>As evening approached, the disciples came to Him and said, "This is a remote place and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." <sup>16</sup>Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." <sup>17</sup>"We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. <sup>18</sup>"Bring them here to Me," He said. <sup>19</sup>And He directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and two fish and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. <sup>20</sup>They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. <sup>21</sup>The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, open up our hearts to Your Word today. Lord, touch us with the Good News. Remind us that we are Yours and that You are ours. Through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So we've been going through Romans these past weeks over this summer. I have to admit. That's quite a text from Romans we have today. I'm not sure about you, but I don't know how many of us heard this text from Romans today and just thought, "Wow! My soul is so blessed!" It's a bit obscure. I'll call it out! It's a bit of an obscure text, kind of a head-scratcher maybe. Paul goes from our text last week in Romans chapter 8, "I am convinced that neither life nor death, angels or demons, the present or the future, nor power, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus."<sup>1</sup> Then he seems to go on to a tangent. "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart."<sup>2</sup> Wait! Hold on! What about the love

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:38-39

<sup>2</sup> Romans 9:2

of Jesus? Where's the sorrow coming from? He says, "How I wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ, for the sake of my people, the people of my own race, the people of Israel"<sup>3</sup> Then he recounts this list of events and experiences and institutions from Israel's history. It says, "Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the Law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."<sup>4</sup>

So why the gear shift in the scripture here? I think that it is actually no real gear shift at all. It's not a tangent. For Paul, it is the logical progression of this line of thinking. It may seem like an obscure text, but I think that as we work through it today, you'll see that not only is it a powerful meditation on the great love of God, but that it's relevant today for us who would desire to know Him and His love for us. So let's get into it. I want to get this text back up on the screen here.

So there is the adoption to sonship, the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and promises, the patriarchs, the human ancestry of the Messiah. Paul is highlighting for us some of the major events, experiences, and institutions of the Old Testament, things that would have been identity-defining for the people of Israel, the things that were from their past that shaped and informed and inspired their present, the very thing that gave them hope for the future.

So Paul goes through this list. He says there's the adoption to sonship. He's reminding God's people "God. Chose. You." They weren't shown God's love and favor because they were the holiest or most righteous people. God chose them because He wanted to. He said you are mine not because you deserve it but because I love you.

And the divine glory is the glory of God that guided them through the desert of Egypt to the Promised Land, that went from the top of Mount Sinai and dwelt with them in the tabernacle, and then the temple, a reminder of the nearness of God. He drew near to them and was always with them.

The covenants were the faithful and binding promises of God given to His people. Now we often talk about God as being all-powerful and we'll use the theological term saying He's omnipotent. He has power to do everything or anything. I promise this isn't heresy but there is something that God can't do. He

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 9:3-4a

<sup>4</sup> Romans 9:4-5

can't break His promises. He has committed Himself to His people and He says I will always be faithful.<sup>5</sup> Those are the covenants.

And there's the receiving of the Law, the Torah. This is God's law given at Mount Sinai which was the instruction for God's people and the wisdom for them on how to live and thrive in relationships with one another and with Him as God led them out of slavery and into a land of abundance.

And then there was the temple worship. I have to admit that for me right now my theological fascination is with the temple. If you were in my Bible class these last few weeks through Jonah, you got to hear a lot about that. I highly suspect you'll hear more in preaching and perhaps even Bible classes going into the future. The temple is this fascinating thing to me. I always thought, "Wow, we get lots of tedious things about the temple - the way people would go in or come out, what you had to wear, how you had to wash, and when. In Exodus, we get this exciting narrative going through Exodus that almost comes to a screeching halt at Mount Sinai where then Exodus goes on to commit nearly 20 chapters to explain how to build the temple - how big and what color the curtains should be, what to make the tables and lamp stands out of. It seems almost like "Wow, where is this come from?"

But something interesting happens in the narrative of Exodus, something that the people of God would have been intimately aware of. In Exodus chapter 19, they come to the base of Mount Sinai. The glory and majesty of God comes and dwells on top of that mountain. It is so mighty, so majestic that the mountain itself shakes and the people fear to even touch a toe to the base of it. Then there's that explanation of the temple, punctuated by a few different things, by the incident with the golden calf that first unfaithfulness of Israel, by God revealing Himself to Moses at the top of Mount Sinai, where He said I am the LORD your God, "the LORD, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness."<sup>6</sup> Then they go on another eight or nine chapters explaining how the temple was built.

And then something incredible happens. When the temple is finished and dedicated, the presence of God, in all His glory, comes from the top of Mount Sinai, where they couldn't even touch a toe to the mountain, into the Tabernacle where He dwells right in the midst of God's people. They had the temple, not as rigorous and legalistic ways to worship and live, but as ways to live with the holy and perfect presence of God, right in the midst of a sinful and imperfect people.

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<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 7:9

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 34:6-7 (NASB)

And there were God's promises, Paul reminds them, His faithful words to His people. These promises are incredible because God chooses to make them. He doesn't have to. But in His love and grace, He chooses to.

Paul says there are the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You know one of the ways that the scripture often refers to God is as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These were the ones through whom God would build a blessed people, who would then go on to be a blessing to all of the rest of the world.

And in all of these things [that Paul lists], they pointed forward. They pointed forward to a hope of a Messiah, who would usher these things to their completion, who would fulfill them for God's people.

So why does Paul pivot from his profound meditation in Romans 8 on the unbreakable love of God to rattling off a list of things from the history of the Jewish people? He's recalling the ways that God has revealed Himself and His love to His people, but not just that. He's reminding them of how these things pointed forward to something, something even greater that was to come. These Jewish people lived in the hope of something that would come. He's taking all of these significant threads in the Old Testament and then he ties them together in Jesus of Nazareth.

Each and every one of these things mentioned in this passage is a way that God has revealed His character to humanity - gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, examples of His faithfulness, that in all things, though His people were wayward, prodigal, and unfaithful, He remained true. He poured out His love on people throughout all of history. And that love came to a head in Jesus Christ. It was fulfilled and perfected in Him and then through Christ, it was offered to all people, including us.

This adoption to sonship, we spoke about it three weeks ago at length, that we are made children of God by faith in Christ and that the Holy Spirit dwelling within us confirms that we are His children. The divine glory, the glory of God is Christ crucified. It's the cross. God's glory revealed how far He would go to show His incredible love for us. His Law is written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The presence of God that came from Mount Sinai and dwell in the Tabernacle is we, the people of God, are filled with the Holy Spirit. That presence dwells within us. Paul, in another place, reminds the people, "Don't you know that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit?"<sup>7</sup>

God's history is one of incredible faithfulness, united and given to all people through Christ. This incredible love, what He has done for us in Christ is the good

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19

news of hope, purpose, redemption, and salvation that we have all been waiting for. For Paul, in this text today, he is devastated that Israel, the people who were most looking forward to it, missed it when it came. They missed him when He came. The very thing they had hoped for and yet they didn't see it.

The truth is that many miss it today. So many miss what God is up to, how He's showing His love, providing guidance, leading each and every day. Even for those of us who believe, it can be easy to miss what Christ is up to in our lives. It can be easy to lose track of what God has promised is all already ours through faith. You see if your faith is in Christ, there's no question that God is at work in your life. He promised He is and so He is. Yet how often is it for us that God is at work in our lives and yet for whatever reason, we don't see it. We got caught up in the things going on in life, in the distractions, so fixated on what's happening that we miss what God is doing.

In 1994, the author, Charles Hummel wrote a book called The Tyranny of the Urgent about how life can become dominated by the things that aren't important, but are urgent. We get so focused on the things in front of us for the day or the week or the season that we forget to have our eyes up and open to see what God is doing each and every day in our lives. It's like someone stopped at a traffic light, their nose buried in their phone, not realizing that the light has turned green. Things occupy our minds and attention because they're right in front of us. Yet they can cause us to miss what God is doing in our midst. Sometimes it's distractions. It's things that are entirely insignificant.

This is personal confession time for me. Sometimes I will get to the end of a day, feeling like I'm so busy, with so much going on, things at church, the kids, and family life. I don't have any time to sit in the Scriptures, don't make any time to spend with God. Then I look at that screen time indicator on my phone that tells me I spent two hours on my phone today. It's not that I didn't have it. It's that I didn't see it.

Is it possible that the business and the distractions of life are causing you to miss what God is up to in your life? If so, I want to leave you with something you can try this week, a way of tuning ourselves to the presence and work of God in our lives. One of the historic practices of the church is called the Prayer of Examen. The Prayer of Examen is a daily practice of reflecting on the day that has just gone by, to see places where God has been present and active, but also to see places where our lives have been out of sync with God's will, places where the wrong thing was done, or the right thing wasn't done. The point of the Prayer of Examen is to go through each day in a thoughtful and mindful way, looking back

on what happened to see God's fingerprints, in hopes that as we do, we learn to better see it in the moment, to see it in our conversations, in the time we spend in our commute, the tasks of work or school, the unplanned interactions with strangers and more. God's present in all of them. Now if you're interested in trying it out this week, I've prepared a handout with a guide for how to go through a Prayer of Examen. It takes 15, maybe 20 minutes. You can grab one of those handouts outside of the narthex on your way out today.

I would encourage you, as you do, one of the pitfalls of zoning in on spiritual disciplines as a Christian is we think that is disciplines that make us holy. It's not. God makes us holy. The spiritual disciplines are an opportunity for us to open our eyes to the riches of God's love and His grace which is His free gift, which is already ours.

So perhaps this Prayer of Examen can become a regular part of your day or something you do once or twice a week. What so many Christians throughout the centuries have found who have used this practice is that not only do they become more able to see where God has been active and present in their lives in the day past, but they are more in tune with it as it's happening, recognizing God's grace in the small things. You see God's incredible love and grace have been working throughout all of history, the patriarchs and the promises, the Old Testament law, the temple and God's presence, all of it fulfilled in Christ, perfected in Christ, and offered as God's free gift of grace to you and me.

So I encourage you, as you come to the Lord's table today and you hear those familiar words "Given for you ... Shed for you," I want you to hear and know with confidence that the riches of God's love, grace, and mercy truly are given for you. They're yours. As surely as you take that bread and wine in your hands, they are yours. The truth is that the history of Israel is the history of God's covenant faithfulness, the history of His saving work, so that His love and grace could be known throughout all of the Earth. And in Jesus Christ, it is perfected and offered to all. In Jesus Christ, they are yours. Don't miss it.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, teach us to have eyes for You, to seek and to see You in all circumstances, to know that You are with and working in and through us each and every day. By Your grace, we pray in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.