

# Morning Worship 1\_2\_2022

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## SPEAKERS

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00:06

It is time for us to get a little more deeply into God's Word together. So as I invite you to do every week, I hope that you'll have scripture out and open, if that is a personal Bible or a Bible app and invite you to use that. If you need something, there are read Bibles available in any of the pews. And we will be in the book of Romans once again this morning in the New Testament. So if you're looking for that, you can go past the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and then the book of Acts. And then you'll find Romans also just want to say that if you came in a little bit later did not have a chance to get one of the individual servings of communion that we have there from one of our elders, you can just raise your hand one of them will bring it over to you in the seat. If we missed anybody. For that, make sure you had that for right afterwards. Well, it's good to be back together here at the start of this new year, I think that it goes without saying that the last few years have been turbulent that you thought I was gonna say unprecedented, didn't you? It's been hard to find any points of stability, or steadiness. And as we begin this new year, then I want to turn our attention with you to something that is stable, something that is steadfast in every generation, and that is the purposes, the promises, and very character of God. Last fall, we began this series where we're studying Paul's letter to the Christians who were in the ancient city of Rome. And if you were wondering, as we had finished up at the end of chapter eight, are we going to keep going with this in the new year? Well, the answer that is yes, we're gonna keep going with this. Romans is one of the most incredible sections in all of Scripture. It's full of some just Brilliantly beautiful and profound truths. It also has some sections that are a little unexpected, maybe a little challenging at first read, we're gonna get into one of those here this morning. But before we do, I'd like you to pray once more with me. Great and gracious God, we thank you for this time that we have to be here together this morning. Quiet our distracted minds, calm are distraught hearts. Let us hear what it is that you have to say. And let us respond then in ways that demonstrate our love for you, and our love for others. And Father, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts would be acceptable in Your sight. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Had we not been doing an extended study in the book of Romans, I confess that this particular passage in Romans nine would not have been on my own shortlist of ones to begin the new year. Here with You. However, the more time that I spent with it more time I was looking at it, the more I found it, to offer what I think are some very significant reminders, and even words of encouragement for us as we begin this new year together. Now, I know that it's a long weekend, a lot of people are probably tired, a little distracted. It's also a pretty complex and a weighty section. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to give you the payout right up

front, and then we'll back up and see how we got to that just to make it a little bit easier on everybody here this morning. So here it is, as we're looking at this passage, what I want to see with you are two direct points of application. And then one summary principle, two direct points of application and one summary principle. The first direct point that comes out of it is this, do not assume that you are right with God just because of your outward associations. Don't assume that you're right with jargon just because of whatever outward points of identity you may have. Second, recognize with humility, that God has mercy on whomever He wills. God has mercy on whomever He wills. And then the summary principle that is going to come out of this particular passage is this that God's purposes are sure and trustworthy. Even though they may be fulfilled in some ways that surprised us. His purposes, his plans, his character, it's sure it's trustworthy, it might happen might unfold. In some ways that surprised us though. Alright, that's the payout. Now we're going to back up, we're going to look at the passage we'll see how it is that we got to those points. Here's Romans chapter nine verses one through 18. This again, is the word of the Lord. I'm speaking the truth in Christ. I'm not lying. My conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, 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, they are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, 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 overall, bless it forever. Amen. But it is not as though the word of God has failed for not all who are descending Did from Israel belong to Israel, not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring. But through Isaac show your offspring be named. This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promises said, about this time, next year I will return and Sarah shall have a son. And not only so but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 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, she was told, the older will serve the younger, as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. What should we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means for he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. And I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, for this very reason I have raised you up that I might show my power in you, and my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. So then He has mercy on whomever he wills, and He hardens, whomever He wills. What is going on in this section in the letter, remember, these are not written in individual segments. This was a letter that you read straight through. And if you were with us, Paul had built up to this just incredible triumph and announcement at the end of chapter eight, we said, there's nothing that can possibly separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And then he immediately jumps into this, what's going on here? Remember the context. And remember some of the content that we've seen. This was written to a group of Christians who are coming from some mixed backgrounds, many of them that come from ethnically and culturally and religiously Jewish backgrounds, many from ethnically and culturally and religiously Gentile, that is non Jewish backgrounds. That's why Paul began the letter by saying the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes do Gentile everyone. And he goes through and just displays it in all its brilliance than saying, it's not about what you have performed. It's about what God has promised. None of us can be made right can be justified with God through our actions. It comes by faith. Every single one of us is accountable to God, every single one of us has sinned and fallen short of God's glory. But in Christ, there's no condemnation. He says, God is for us in Christ, and there's nothing that can possibly separate us from him. So again, he builds all the way up to that. And then right here, as one person said, the tone shifts dramatically from celebration, to lamentation. And again, we say why? If you're familiar, the book of Romans, you know that in particular, chapters nine through 11, are very dense, they're very theologically nuanced. Many people consider them to be just this kind of separate aside, or Paul just goes off on a tangent for a little bit. But they're not that they're not that Paul was addressing a

concern that would have weighed very, very heavily upon the hearts of his original audience very heavily upon his own heart. And the concern was this. If all of this is true about the gospel, then why have so many Jewish people not accepted Jesus as the Messiah? His concern was this if God chose Abraham, and through Abraham, his descendants to the nation of Israel to stand in this special relationship with him. But now, not only are some of them, not a part of that, but you've also got Gentiles coming into it. They saying, what's going on? How does how does all of this fit together? Was the Old Testament just a prototype? And then God's beta testing something in the New Testament? What is going on here? Is God's character steady? Are his purposes or his promises trustworthy over time? Or are they not? Do you hear? That's a very important question. We may not have gotten understood why he brought this up in the way that he did. But that question we can understand, are God's purposes, trustworthy over time? Is God going to do the things that he said he's going to do or not? That's an incredibly important question. And you hear Paul's own emotional investment in this in the first few verses. That's because again, you know, Paul himself was Jewish, he was deeply rooted in his lineage and his identity as a part of that covenant community. Even though his own primary mission was to share the Good News of Jesus with the Gentiles. He spent years preaching and teaching and synagogues introducing the good news of Jesus to his Jewish brothers and sisters, some of them believed, but many did not. And that grieved him to the point of saying, he said, I wish I could even just trade places with you. Right? This is not what I want to see happening. He also knew the questions that came up again, the question is this If God made promises to Abraham and his descendants, but those promises did not seem to be embraced or fulfilled, then has God's word failed. You see the significance of that question? He says here no God's Word has not failed. And the reason he explains is that Israel is primarily a point of spiritual and not biological identity. This is the first point I want to look at with you here. Now, Israel, this identity of being a part of Israel is primarily he says, a spiritual and not a biological or genetic point of identity. God's Word of Promise was given to Abraham and through him to his descendants. In fact, God said, Abraham, one of your descendants is going to be a blessing to the nations, one of your descendants is going to establish my people forever one of your descendants is going to be the Messiah who would deliver his people from their sin and everything that God promised and entrusted to Israel was at the forefront of their collective identity. All those things that he listed in verse four, you see that again, he talks about the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship, the promises, he's saying all of these things were testifying to that one promise of God. And that's fulfilled in Jesus. He is the one descendant of Abraham, who brings all of these things to their fulfillment. Paul Spee, just a little side note here, as Paul Paul speaks of Jesus in a very profound way, and just a couple words there, he talks about the Christ, who is descendant of them according to the flesh that way he's acknowledged this is, by the way, this is, I'm in the bottom half of verse five here, right now, he talks about according to the descending of their race, according to flesh is the Christ, he's acknowledging the humanity of Jesus. He says, the Christ, who is God overall, acknowledging the divinity of Jesus. In fact, that's what that's one of the most explicit statements about Jesus in the New Testament anywhere. The Christ Jesus is God overall. Bless it forever. Amen. So these astounding promises that God has made are fulfilled in Jesus. But then many people weren't accepting this. Many people weren't recognizing that or seeing for what it was. So how do you reconcile this discrepancy? Paul saying there are two options. Either God's word has failed, or Israel refers to something other than Abraham's genetic, biological descendants. The Word of God has not failed. God did send his promised Messiah to deliver his people. So the it's about understanding who the children of promise are. That's what he's getting at. Here he goes, he goes through a couple different examples. And even before I get to that this, hopefully this is an obvious point of clarification. When Paul was talking about Israel and any of this stuff, it is not a reference to the modern day political nation state. That's not it's a totally different things. He's talking about Abraham's descendants hear this nation of Israel. And he says this. He said, Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, not all are children of Abraham, because they are his offspring. And then he uses two different sets of brothers to demonstrate this point. He uses two sets of brothers to demonstrate this point he uses Isaac and Ishmael the sons of Abraham. And

then he uses Jacob and Esau, with Isaac and Ishmael Abraham was the biological father of both of them. And here he says, No, it was through a Isaac that the promise is traced. And then with Jacob and Esau, it's and even more pointed example, you may know, Isaac and Ishmael have different mothers. So maybe you might try to make the case. Well, that's the difference there. And Jacob and Esau, you can't make that argument. They were twins. Same mom, same dad says both born of Isaac and his wife, Rebecca, yet he says this lineage, this line of promise mysteries through Jacob, and not through Esau, he's showing even more clearly there that this identity of Israel is something other than just a simple genetic biological lineage. And it's not the first time that Paul's brought this up. He did it even earlier in this letter back in chapter two, he had said no one is a Jew, who is just one outwardly, it's about inwardly. In chapter four, he had said that Abraham is the Father of all who believe in God's promises. Abraham is the father of everyone who puts their faith in God's promises. Another place, he says, this pretty clearly is in the letter that Paul wrote to the Galatian churches. This is Galatians, three, verses seven through nine. There he says, talking about the same kind of idea. He says, No, then that it is those of faith who were the sons of Abraham. And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preach the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, in you shall all the nations be blessed. So then those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. The point he's trying to make here he's saying, in different ways, in different parts of the letter, even in different letters that he wrote is to being part of Israel means being traced through the promise those who put their faith in the promise that God is made to send his Messiah. So that's who Israel is, the people who put their faith in their trust fully, in that. In some ways you can think of it almost kind of like a Venn diagram, right? If you have the genetic, biological nation of Israel, and then the Gentiles and that overlap in the middle, they're using all those who are putting their faith or trust in God's promises. That is the Israel that I'm speaking about here, saying, it's not just these descendants, not on biological descendants, not a genetic thing of anything here. Now, I'm spending a moment on this because this is a crucial point. John says something very similar. In the beginning of his gospel, John says this, but to all who did receive Him Jesus to all who did receive Him and believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God who were born not of the not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God. You see, our identity as sons and daughters of God does not depend on any kind of outward association that we may have any kind of genetic descent or lineage or anything that is going on there. It's not an anything, anything that we have done, or we will do, it depends entirely upon God's mercy. And that's the second point that he really starts to make here. That our relationship with God depends entirely on his freely given mercy. He uses two examples here, again, there's an overlap Jacob and Jacob and Esau serve as kind of an example for both of these points, as he's making this point about Jacob and Esau. He says this again, in verses beginning in verse 11. He said, though they were not yet born, they hadn't done anything, not nothing, either good or bad, said they not about anything that they did, he said, but in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works. He said, There is a difference that was made. He said, Jacob, I loved, Esau hated. That's a harsh statement. Let me just say a quick word about that. First, it's a quote from Malikai, the beginning of Prophet Malikai. There, the Lord is talking not just about individuals, but about the entire nation that was descended from those two. But the point is saying here, love and hate him, you hear those words, we tend to think of emotions, first of all. So I don't want you to hear those thinking of heated emotions that God is directing in different ways towards those two, it's more, it always refers to an action that is demonstrated. So it helps you could read those or interpret those better as one was accepted. One was rejected. I just don't want you to hear this kind of heated emotion that's attached to it. That's not what he's getting at. He says, Well, God accepted one and rejected the other. Why? That says, Why have mercy on him, I will have mercy. And the flip side of that example, was Pharaoh, then he brings up the example of Pharaoh in verse 17. Why was Pharaoh subject to God's judgment? Book of Exodus, it's really interesting. There are some places in Exodus where it says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, some places where it says God hardened Pharaoh's heart, and some places where it just says his heart was hard. There's, there's a profound mystery there. I can't explain all of that to you. We can't say this, though.

Pharaoh's heart was not hardened against his will, was not hardened against his will. And yet God did act through him in a way to accomplish his purpose. The result, though we're told is that God's righteousness would be seen that his glory would be seen the point that he is making these examples, and again, they're difficult to fully get our heads around. The point he's making goes back to the passage you heard a little bit ago in Exodus 15, where the Lord is talking to Moses, and he said, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. I will show compassion, to whom I will show compassion. We can't do anything to force God's hand. We can't do anything to cause God to force him to react and show mercy or compassion. God does that of his own will. He extends those things as he will to whom He will. And the question that always comes up, then question that came up for Paul for his audience. The question I'm sure most of us have out there right now is, is that fair? Is that just Paul says that here? He said, Is there any injustice? What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? That's a big question. We're actually gonna get a lot more deeply into it next week. But even here, in short, he says, no, no, there's not. Here's just a couple quick reasons. For one, the actions of God are always adjust and right because God is God, I realize that sounds like circular logic, but it holds. If God is good, then all of God's actions are good. The other thing to remember is that every single person has rebelled against God. Every single person has rejected God through their sins, and no one deserves God's mercy or his compassion. It's not about God and maliciously withholding those things from somebody who deserves it. It's about God freely, and graciously extending it to those who do not deserve it. But still, it raises a lot of questions, it raises these same questions that we see in here is this injustice then and Paul doesn't explain them all the way. He doesn't answer all the questions that we'd like to. But he asserts in the strongest possible way that God is not acting in justly, indeed, he cannot. Again, I want to, I want to acknowledge that we can look at this. What do we do with something like verse 18, where it says, So then He has mercy on whomever he wills and He hardens? whomever He wills? Again, I can't answer all that for you, perhaps in the extent that you'd like to, but let me just offer you a couple of thoughts that I have found helpful as I looked at this. The first comes from a guy named Doug mu. He's a theologian and commentator wrote a really excellent work on the book of Romans. He said this God's bestowing of mercy in his heart pardoning are not equivalent acts is important here, God's bestowing mercy is hurting and not equivalent acts, God's mercy is given to those who do not deserve it is hardening affects those who have already by their sin and deserves condemnation. That's a different theory says we've all deserved God's judgment because of our sin. None of us deserve God's mercy. So they're not equivalent acts. But he says God acts freely in the ways that he chooses. Here's another one that is helpful in this, this may surprise you to come from who this is coming from. John, if somebody you know John Calvin are familiar with him, he's one of the theological four fathers in our own tradition, he often gets associated with this idea of kind of like a cold hard predestination idea, which is not what you read in his writings if you get into him. Here's what he said in his commentary on Romans, though this is significant. Calvin said this, let this then be our sacred rule to seek to nodes, nothing except what Scripture teaches us. When the Lord closes his holy mouth, let us also stop the way that we might not go farther. That's a really important place to go to say if God says something here to us clearly, then we need to try and understand that to do something with that. But if God doesn't answer the questions, we shouldn't think that we're going to figure them out somehow. It was not all explained to us there perfectly, we're not going to be able to come up with it on our own. So he says, if we are told something here, then we can confidently stand on that we are constantly said, told that God freely extends His mercy and His compassion to whomever He wills. That's a quick walk through some deep theological grass, I understand that. That's why I gave you the payout up front. That's why I want to come back to it right here now. And hopefully, you can see how this passage helped us to get there. Again, we didn't answer all the questions, we can't answer all these different ones. But there are, I think, two direct points of application. And then just a summary principle that I want to offer to you here again, this morning. Here's the direct points again, first one is this, do not assume that you are right with God just because of your outward associations, or outer points of identity. That was Paul, Paul was getting it that idea here. Now notice that he doesn't belittle the things that served us outwardly identify the

nation of Israel, he doesn't belittle or minimize those things. He speaks very highly of the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship, the promises, he speaks highly of those things, but he just says that those don't actually realize, really reveal what's going on in your heart. Just you having access to those things does not really show what's going on in your heart. That's why he's saying Israel is the people of God who trusting God's promises. And so that is often the case for those who participate in those outward associations. But it's not always a one to one correlation. So what's that mean for us, as we're sitting here now, this morning, there's a lot of points of application, we could think of this. Having your name on the membership roles of the church is not the most important thing. Maybe your mother or father was the greatest Christian that you've ever known. And you're a part of a family who considers themselves Christians, that's not the most important thing for you. Maybe you think that you've got the right voter registration, that's not the most important thing. Maybe you've been born in or living in a country that you think is the most important one, that's not the most important thing. Maybe you participate in some cultural practices that give the appearance of outward faith. But that's not the most important thing. What matters is whether you personally have a relationship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. What matters is whether you personally have received this free gift of God's grace and whether you personally are placing your faith and your trust in these promises. That's what it means to be children of the promise. That's the most important thing. So don't assume that you're right with God just because you've got some outward associations or outer points of identity that look good. The second one is that we have to recognize with humility that God has mercy on whomever He wills. Now, there are two main implications to this. The first one is this. If you know and love the Lord, if you've experienced God's mercy, don't ever, ever, ever forget that that only comes to you by God's grace. You haven't done anything to deserve that. Neither have I. As soon as you start thinking that you have done something to deserve that or that you can do something to lose that, then you've lost sight of the fact that God's mercy is freely given to whomever He wills. And the only proper response to that is humble gratitude, and joy. The other implication of this is that we can't presume to think that we are the ones who get to determine who God will call to Himself in faith. Don't think that we get to determine who does or does not deserve to hear the gospel, because we think that they will or they won't respond, share and show the love of Jesus with everyone that you can, knowing that it is up to God to work in the hearts of those whom He will no one deserves God's mercy on their own merits. Yet God freely extends it to those whom He will so pray to God will show his mercy to those who do not yet know him. But remember that there is A mystery here that ought to humble us. Recognize with humility that God has mercy on whomever He wills. And the summary principle that comes out of this and and maybe this is the thing that I hope is perhaps most helpful as we start this new year together, is this God's purposes are sure, and his promises are trustworthy, even though they might be fulfilled in ways that surprised us. His purposes are sure his promises are trustworthy, they might be fulfilled in ways that surprised us or that we didn't see coming though. Why did God promised to give Abraham a son and then wait so long to fulfill it that Abraham took matters into his own hands by impregnating a servant? I don't know. Mighty God except Jacob and reject Esau? I don't know. But God did make good on his word, that a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is indeed the Messiah, Jesus Christ, a blessing to the nations who is God over all bless it forever. Amen. Why did God choose to raise up in Austin and Pharaoh whose defeat would demonstrate the power and the righteousness of God? I don't know. But God made good on his word to set his people free from bondage to lead them to a land of promise in a way that only God could do. Why does God work in this world in the way that he does? I don't know. But God has said that the same Jesus who died and rose again is coming again. And when he does, he will make all things new. And we can trust in that, even though the way that it unfolds might not be what we expected. Even though the way that it unfolds might be somewhat surprising to us, it might be different than how we think the script should be drawn up. But it will happen, because God has said that it will. All these sentiments really are similar ones. Before we find in the famous passage in the prophet Isaiah, this is Isaiah 55, verses six to 11. Isaiah 55, six to 11 say there Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the

unrighteous man his thoughts, let him return to the Lord, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain in the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater so be my word that goes out from my mouth, it shall not return to me empty. It will accomplish that which I purpose and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. Think of the last few years have shown us anything that's that it's foolish, to try to predict what's going to happen in the days or weeks or months ahead. I mean, this year may unfold in spectacularly boring fashion, I kind of hope that it does. Or it may present us with some new and continued challenges, whatever it ends up looking like. Paul's reminder is one that I hope you will have in mind as you go through that time. It is not as though the word of God has failed. I mean, isn't that one of the best reminders that we can have at the start of a new year, we might not be able to fully understand or explain why God acts the way that he does. But God is sovereign, and his purposes are trustworthy, and true. So place your faith and trust in that not in any outward points of association or identity that you have other than who you are in Jesus Christ. And remember with humility that God has mercy on whom He will. And yet he graciously promises that everyone who calls in the name of the Lord will be saved. And finally, enter this new year with confidence knowing that God's promises are sure and trustworthy, even if they're fulfilled in some ways, that surprised us. Let's pray together. Holy God, comfort us with the reminder that your word has not failed, nor will it fail. enable us to rest and trust in you at all times. It's in Jesus name we pray. Amen.