

# Morning Worship 1\_9\_2022

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## SPEAKERS

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It's time for us to get a little more deeply into God's word here together. So I would invite you as always to have scripture out and open as we go. If you have a personal Bible or Bible app that you'd like to use, I hope you'll get that if you need something, there are read Bibles available in any of the pews. And again, this morning, we will be in the book of Romans, which is in the New Testament, right after the four Gospels. And in the book of Acts, you'll find Roman so I hope you'll have that out and open as we go. Right after my oldest son was born, I can remember being in the hospital and going over to the cafeteria and seeing one of his doctors there. And so I walked over, I just wanted to say hello, say thank you for everything that they had done. And as I got close, I saw that he was standing near to one of the trash cans right next to that, and he was eating what looked to be a small bowl of ice cream. And I saw him take a bite look like he was chewing for a moment maybe. And then he bent over and discreetly spit something out into the trashcan. And I'd already made my commitment to walk over to him. So I still went and got there and said hello. He was very friendly. And and as we talked for a moment, I saw him do that two or three more times you take a bite of ice cream and sort of take a moment and he'd spit something in the trashcan. And then I finally said, What are you doing? Is the ice cream? Okay, is it bad? What's going on? He said, No, it's great. I just don't like those little chocolate chips that are in there. Nice. Oh, well. I mean, they had there were other options there. Yeah, there are all kinds of other flavors there. And he looked at I said, Why did you get that one? He looked at me just dead dead straight and said because I love chocolate chip ice cream. And I thought do you though the conversation it died pretty awkwardly after that we didn't have anywhere to go look brilliant neonatologist weird food etiquette, right. We're in the midst of this extended study that we've been doing in Paul's letter to the Christians in the ancient city of Rome. And the book of Romans is one the most famous sections of Scripture. It's an incredible part of Scripture. Even the time that we've been in this I've had many of you come up and say I just love this letter. It's such a powerful letter is so much good stuff in it. Last week, however, we got to a section this letter that many people treat the same way that Malcolm's doctor treated his chocolate chip ice cream, right, they just skip over it or they ignore it. They're not quite sure what to do with it. And even as they do, they say, Hey, I love the book of Romans, there's just some parts I'm not really sure what to do with. On the other hand, there are some people who just focus almost exclusively on this, it's like just grabbing a handful of chocolate chips, and I can get carried away with this illustration. I'll stop that. Alright, let's get into the text. But before we do, let's take another moment and pray together. Great and gracious God, we thank you for this time that we have to be here together today. Quiet are

distracted minds. Calm are distraught hearts. Let us hear what it is that you have to say and let us respond 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. Last week, we moved into this section a letter that can be a little bit challenging chapters nine through 11 have some pretty nuanced theologies, and pretty complex ideas that are in there. And because of that, a lot of people think this was just a little sidebar tangent that Paul went off on. And we don't really have to spend a lot of time on that it's not related to the rest of this stuff as clearly as we think that it could be. That's really not the case. As I tried to introduce to you last week in the section, Paul is addressing a major concern that would have weighed very heavily upon the hearts of certainly his original audience, it weighed heavily upon his own heart. And the question was this, if God chose Abraham, and then through Abraham, the entire nation of Israel to stand in this special relationship to God, but now not only are there Gentiles who are being brought into the kingdom of God, but there are some in the nation of Israel who have not accepted God's Messiah, Jesus, and how does all this fit together? Are God's promises still true? Are his purposes steadfast? Are they stable, is gotten trustworthy? And those are some very significant questions. Those are ones that all of us should want to have answered, is what God said he's going to do that thing that he will do is God is stable and trustworthy over time, or not. Now, as we get into the particular section that we're in today, I'll tell you that I wrestled with how to preach through this section here there are, there are a lot of words, there are a lot of concepts, there are a lot of implications that can easily easily lead to just hours of discussions and generate 1000s of pages of scholarly analysis. I know I've read a lot of them myself over the years. And there's a lot that can be gained by getting down as deeply as we can into those things, the subtleties and and maybe hoping that somehow we'll find an answer to the things that people have been wrestling with for 1000s of years. But when you're doing that, it's quite easy to lose the forest for the trees. And I'll remind you that when Paul wrote this letter, it was a letter that was meant to be just read publicly and shared as is with the church. They were to just read this together. They're they're Christians were asking questions about who their god is and trying to better understand what his gospel was all about. So while there is a lot to be gained from getting really down deep into the nuances, and look, I enjoy doing that if you talk to me afterwards, we can go as deep into some of this stuff as you want to. There's also a lot to be gained from just making sure that we get the main points that Paul is trying to communicate, and acknowledging that not all of our questions may be perfectly answered. So what I want to do with our time here this morning is look at what I think are the two main points that Paul was making in this section. And then we'll acknowledge that they're tough, and they can make a lot of people pretty uncomfortable. And then after that, I'll try to suggest to you try to show you why the alternatives that we think might be better really aren't, because they offer us no meaningful hope. So that's what I'll try to do here this morning. And the first main idea that comes out of this is that God decides who will be his people. God decides who will be his people, this is chapter nine, verses 19 through 29. Listen again now to the word of the Lord. You will say to me, then, why does he still find fault? For who can resist His will? But who are you? Oh man, the answer back to God? Well, what is molded say to its moto? Why have you made me like this? As the potter no right over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for dishonorable use. What if God, desiring to show His wrath and make known as power has endured with much patience, vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory, for vessels of mercy which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles, as indeed he says, In Hosea, those who are not my people, I will call my people and her who was not Beloved, I will call beloved, and in the very place where was said to them, You are not my people, there, they will be called sons of the living God. And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, though the number of the sons of Israel V as the sand of the sea, Only a remnant of them will be saved, for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay. And as Isaiah predicted, if the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Saddam and become like Gomorrah. few verses earlier in the past, if you looked at last week is where

God says, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. God says, I will have mercy on whom I choose to have mercy. There's a quote from the book of Exodus, actually, where the Lord there was speaking to Moses, and we read a little bit ago and Deuteronomy, some of that same larger story there, God says, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and Paul use the examples of Jacob and Esau. Now these are twins directly, biologically genetically descended from Abraham yet before they were born, before they had done anything, God accepted one, and rejected the other. That was true on an individual level, speaking about Jacob and Esau, it's also true then on a group level, the ancient nation of Israel descended from Jacob had this unique status as God's people in the ancient nation of Edom descended from Esau was among those who were considered to be excluded and outside of the people of God. So Paul, in this section is continuing that illustration, he's saying that God decides at both the individual and the group level, who will be his people. And he first talks about that by God calling people to Himself in faith. He says, God calls some people to Himself in faith, he leaves other people in their sin. He says his illustration of a potter that he's making clay and he said, this potter freely chooses from the same lump of clay from the same larger lump. He freely chooses one vessel for honorable use, and another for dishonorable use. He calls him vessels of mercy vessels of wrath. We're getting to some hard ideas here. I'll remind you though, that scripture constantly presents us with two things which seem to us to be in paradox because they don't seem to make sense to us. But Scripture presents us constantly with two things. One, that God is absolutely sovereign over all things. And two, that we are responsible for our actions, and we bear the consequences of our actions. We don't seem to figure out how those line line up a scripture constantly presents us with both of those things. Even in this letter. Remember, Paul has said, every one of us everyone has sinned, and fallen short of God's glory. Every one of us stands guilty before him not only because of our identification with Adam, but also because of our own personal, individual sins were responsible for those things, and for the consequences of those things. So I bring that up, because with this illustration, I don't want you to go the illustrations are not meant to suggest that people are sort of in this neutral position. And God randomly assigned some of the Mercy category in some to the wrath category. It's not meant to bring to mind like the little kid who just stacks up a pile of blocks just so they can go and kick them over. That's not it. Rather, the rest of Scripture says every one have us is dead in our sins and trespasses, every one of us justly deserves God's judgment. It says constantly but God, out of his free mercy out of His grace, not because of anything that we have done graciously extends mercy to whomever He wills. Some of the older confessional documents in our tradition in the reformed tradition will say things like that God was pleased out of the common mass of sinners or out of the mass of fallen humanity, God was pleased to call some to himself. He says that's true on an individual level. But he also talks about that being true on a group level. Then, in verse 24, he says, us who me is called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles. So it's not limited to one particular people group, not only from the Jews also from the Gentiles, that is the non Jews. And he uses to, to Old Testament citations or references the prophet Hosea, that was a place where God said, Those who had not been my people now are my people. Those who had not been called beloved now are called beloved, and he references the prophet Isaiah, where Isaiah said, Look Out of everyone, God saves a remnant. He doesn't destroy them totally. That's what happened to Sodom Gomorrah, that was total destruction. That's not the case that God does call some to himself. The point here is that that's what God does. He calls people to himself, but he does so from every tribe and language and nation and people. It's not confined to one particular group. This is what the Bible refers to when it's speaking about the idea of election. That's an a concept that is seen all throughout Scripture. All through Scripture. For example, God chose Abraham out of all the people on the earth to be the recipient of his promise, God chose the nation Israel out of all the nations on the earth to be the one from whom the Messiah would come. You heard in that reading from Deuteronomy seven a little bit ago, God said, it wasn't because of anything about you wasn't because anything about who you are what you've done, he said, I'm choosing to demonstrate my glory, I'm choosing to demonstrate my grace, by setting you free from your slavery. Jesus later said to his own disciples, I call my sheep by name, they know my voice, and he says, You didn't choose me, but I chose you. In

Ephesians one, we're told that God chose us in Christ before the very foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before me earlier in this letter, Paul says, those whom God had for knew, He predestined, he called he justified, he glorified. It's everywhere in Scripture. It's also a difficult concept. It is. We'll come back to that in a moment why it's such a particularly difficult concept. But all of scripture points us in the same direction. All of it points us in the same direction saying that God is God. We are not. God chooses to act in the ways that he does just as the potter chooses to fashion what he will without any creative input from the clay. That's the first main point. Now under the second one, another one is pretty difficult onto the second one is this, God decides how his people will be made righteous. God decides how his people will be made righteous, these verses, chapter, verse 30, in chapter nine, going down into verse four of chapter 10. What shall we say then? 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. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works, they have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 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. Brothers, my hearts 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. For being ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own they did not submit to God's righteousness, for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. God decides how his people will be made righteous, and we can't be made righteous through our own efforts doesn't matter how zealous how well intentioned we may be in this. That's been perhaps the main theme so far that we've seen all throughout this letter, God gives us His law, He gives us His commandments summarized in the 10 commandments, it says, This is what righteous living looks like. This is what a truly righteous person looks like and how they are supposed to live. But we realize immediately that none of us can do that perfectly. None of us can meet all of those demands. None of us are as holy as God has called us to be God's law, then his commands. They're not a blueprint for salvation. They expose our need for a Savior. That's what they do. It doesn't say this is the way for you to climb up to reach God. It says this is showing you why you need someone to make things right between you and God. And yet, that's not the way that we perceive these things. And Paul is rebuking the mind said, He's speaking here. He's talking about Israel. And he's speaking of Jewish people. But look, first of all, Paul's not making any kind of anti semitic comments here. He was Jewish. First of all himself. He's rebuking a mindset that shows up everywhere. It's a mindset that many of us have, or have had, at some point, it's a mindset that says, I'm going to earn my standing before God, I'm going to prove my worth. I'm going to strive relentlessly to be perfect, or at least to cover up my imperfections so that nobody else can see them. And maybe hopefully, God won't realize that they're there. He's getting it this idea that shows itself everywhere that you can work your way to righteousness, that you can self improve enough to actually become holy. You can't. Instead, we are made right with God through what Jesus Christ has done, we receive that we accept that we trust in that by faith, Paul here says that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness. To everyone who believes that's a really loaded phrase, there's a lot of them in here, I just want to point out this. So what does the word and mean there? Christ is the end of the law. Sometimes we can use the word end, and it refers to a termination, a stopping point, something doesn't exist. After that. Oftentimes, we can also use the word end to express a purpose and intention, a goal, desired thing towards what you're working for. That's what's meant here. He's saying that the law was meant to drive you to Jesus to show you that you need him, he is the one who fulfilled that perfectly. He is the one who gives us the righteousness that we can't find or attain. On our own. Jesus Himself said as much in the Sermon on the Mount. And sermon on the mount is where he said, I don't want you to think that I have come to abolish the law I have come to fulfill to fulfill the law. You saying this is how you are made righteous, not through what you do, but through what Christ has done for you God chooses, he decides to make his people righteous through what Jesus has done for them not through their own actions. So these are the two main ideas that are in the section there, God decides who his people will be. And God decides how his people will be made righteous. Those

are hard concepts. Those are very difficult to accept. We hear those and they activate and they activate a lot of our defense mechanisms. They bring all kinds of questions immediately to the surface, don't they? We know that they always do. These truths are challenging to accept, we can acknowledge that I want to talk about why I think that's the case with you before showing how the alternatives that we might think are better, really don't offer us any meaningful hope. But let's acknowledge why they're challenging. First of all, I suggest you that one of the reasons that I think these are challenging is because they undercut our autonomy. And they provoke our pride. The idea that God unilaterally and freely acts in our lives and in this world in ways that he doesn't ask our input for is deeply unsettling for us. Because it undercuts this perceived autonomy that we have. There are few things that are as central to the idea of the modern self, as this conviction that we are fully autonomous beings. That is, we have the capacity, we have the inherent right, to make every decision for ourselves and to chart our own destiny. And it's perhaps uniquely embedded in the American psyche, where we think that anything that anything outside of us that has the potential to shape our actions or direct our circumstances without our explicit prior approval is somehow a threat to us. And so when we hear that God says, I will have mercy on whomever I will, then we rise up, we feel defiant, we feel defensive. We ask questions like you see in verse 19. It says, Woman, what then how can anybody, how are we at fault? How are we at fault if this is the way that it works? And that strikes us as a very legitimate question. We think that's a legitimate question. God needs to answer that. Come back to that in just a moment. But it undercuts our sense of autonomy. That's one one of the reasons I think this is a difficult thing. The other one, particularly with the idea of how it is that we are made righteous is that that provokes our pride. When we're told that we can't be righteous, no matter how hard we try, no matter what we do, it provokes pride for a lot of us because life in a meritocracy that makes sense to us. Do well, and you will be rewarded. Make the grade and you will receive all the results and the rewards from that the cream rises to the top survival of the fittest, etc, etc. We know what these things are. And so when we're told that we can't be righteous, we aren't righteous, and we can't No matter how hard we try, we can again get defiant, we can get defense and we say, Yes, I can watch me. I'm going to do this, I can do this. And that also strikes us as something of a legitimate posture. These things challenge us we can acknowledge that and you know what, there are things in Scripture that can be hard to hear at first. There are a lot of places in scripture we can see things that are hard to hear at first. In John chapter six, when Jesus is talking about him being the bread of life that at the end of that some of his disciples, some of his disciples say this is a really hard teaching, we're not sure what to do with it. It's in the book of Acts chapter 17. And when Paul goes to Athens, and he's proclaiming the resurrection of the dead to the philosopher's there, they say, you're bringing some really strange things to our ears. This isn't something that we've ever heard, we're not really sure what to do with this. There are difficult things that we can find in Scripture. This passage, I think, certainly falls into that category when we see that God decides who will be his people, and that we can only be made righteous when we stop relying in ourselves and put our faith in Jesus Christ. And that's why Paul uses I think these two kind of interesting illustrations to acknowledge that he uses there's simple illustrations but interesting ones, he uses that Potter in the clay one. He says be if we are upset that God is acting without our prior approval or input, he said it's very much like a lump of clay being mad at the potter. Or he says later if when we hear the news that we can't be made righteous through our own efforts. And we get offended at that. He said, it's like a stumbling block. You're you know, you're walking along, you're thinking that everything is fine. And then you trip and you fall on your face when you find out that you are not righteous, and you can't be righteous through what you do. There are simple illustrations, we understand them. Because these are challenging truths. They are. And we may think that some of the alternatives out there are better. What I want to suggest to you now and I want to offer to you is that the fact of the matter is that the alternatives that we think are out there offer no meaningful hope in the end. They really don't, they can't, the alternatives that we might think at first glance, or better ones out there offer us no meaningful hope. In the end, let me try to show you what I mean by this. But this first idea if God is not a sovereign over all things, if he's not sovereign over all things, including who will be his people, then there really

are just two alternative options. One of them is that no one has their hands at the wheel. But everything that happens in this universe is entirely random. And a lot of people hold this position. A lot of people believe this. But there's no way to simultaneously believe that and have any genuine hope for the future. You can't. If everything is absolutely random, if nobody has their hands at the wheel, if nothing means anything, you can't simultaneously believe that and have any real genuine, meaningful hope for the future. God says that He is going to forgive you of his sins. If God says he's going to welcome you into his kingdom of God said he's gonna raise you again to participate in the new creation. And that may or may not happen if God is not actually able to do the things he has said he's going to do and those promises mean nothing. If that's the case, that's one option nobody had nobody is in control. Another one is that you're in charge. And that's the sentiment that's behind the famous closing lines and waymarkers Hamleys poem, Invictus, you know, he says, I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul. And that made me sound maybe at first glance, again, that sounds kind of good to us. But look, lean deeply into that and you realize that's not comforting. It's not. If you think what's going on is something like this. God says yes, Satan says no, and I'm the tie breaking vote, then you have a God who can't actually accomplish what he wants to accomplish, and you ultimately become responsible for your own salvation. And how is that good news? Telling me that I'm responsible for my own salvation. But I have made a wrong turn. Wow, following my GPS. I've gotten questions wrong on an open book test. I've tripped getting off of an escalator How was telling me that I am ultimately responsible for my eternal destiny, any good news? That's devastating news. That's not good. On the other hand, if God is sovereign over all things, including calling you to Himself in faith, then we know that there is a steady hand at the wheel that whatever God in His perfect wisdom decides to happen, will happen. We know that the God who spoke the universe into existence has called us in Christ before the foundation of the world, we know that God will forgive us of our sins, that he will raise us again. In the end, we know that the God who has said that he's going to do these things can do these things, because he will do these things. And we can get to that point, Paul was at the end of chapter eight, where he just triumphantly says, That's why there's nothing that can possibly separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord, because God can do what he says he's going to do. And we may not have all of our questions answered by that. But Scripture tells us a couple places it's frankly arrogant to demand that God answer all of our questions anyway. Paul's illustration here is very much like we find at the end of the book of Job where if you know that book job has been asking and even getting to a point of demanding a God explain himself and God says shows up and speaks out of the world when it says job. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? And after a little bit of a one sided conversation, Joe gets to a point of saying, I have uttered what I did not understand. These things are To wonderful for me, I didn't know them. I had heard of you before with my ear. But now my eyes see you therefore I despise myself I repent in dust and ashes. And you think well, that maybe is a bit of an overreaction their job, not if I understand who God is. Not if we understand who we are before him. And yet the same God, a triumph in the good news of the Gospels at the same God, the lights to show His mercy, to demonstrate his steadfast love to his people, nothing can jeopardize those things. And the Lord, who is the one in throne overall is the same one who has said, Everyone who calls on my name will be saved. So we may think that there are better alternatives out there, but they don't offer us any real meaningful hope. If God can't actually do the things that he said he's going to do. With the other idea, we may think that there are some other better options out there than hearing that we can only be made righteous through Jesus Christ. But if God did not provide that way for us to be made righteous in Christ, that it is all up to us, then everything does rest on our shoulders. And that's the default setting in which we all operate at some point. Verse 32, is getting that in verse 32. And it talks about those who pursued it as if it were based on works. And in verse two, he talks about those who have a zeal for God, but not a real knowledge or understanding of this, we seek to establish our own righteousness and like a number of different times together, I've suggested to you that if that if that is the case, that that only leads to a place of pride, or despair. That's the only place you'll get with that leads you to place a pride if you think that you have actually done those things. And it leads you to a place of despair, when you

realize that you haven't. So we may think it's a better alternative to say, Well, no, I'm going to I'm going to accomplish this on my own. I'm gonna take matters into my own hands. But again, again, how can we have any real hope or confidence in ourselves, when it comes to standing before the Divine Throne and being called to give account for our lives. I don't have a single day of my life, in which I perfectly love God, or my neighbors as he calls me to. I don't have a single day of my life, in which I have my thoughts, my words, my actions have been perfectly righteous, from start to finish. So telling me that God's law is a checklist that I need to fulfill in order to receive my inheritance that also is devastating news. That's not good news. You won't find any real hope any meaningful, any unshakable hope, in that on the other hand, we understand that God's law is meant to expose my sin, it's meant to show me that I need a Savior. And then I hear God say you have one. In Jesus, he's done everything that you need. So stop relying on yourself and put all of your faith and your trust in Him. He gives you the righteousness that you need, then that is good news, I begin to find a legitimate reason to hope, a hope that can actually weather the storms of life because I've got something that goes a lot deeper than just prideful bravado or remorseful despair. God decides who will be as people, God decides how his people will be made righteous. He has mercy on whomever he will. And he calls us he calls every one of us to place our faith in Jesus Christ rather than attempting to do these things on our own. Perhaps you disagree strongly with these concepts? I get that I understand that. Perhaps you think that you need to have all of your questions answered all of your objections addressed before you determine where you land if that's where you're all in. All I can say to you is this. Ask God to show you what is true. But when he does stake everything on that call upon the name of the Lord in faith. He is gracious. He is just, he delights to show His steadfast love to those who put their faith in Him. And think of the words maybe that the apostle Peter shared with the early Christians at the end of his first letter to the church when they were undergoing a period of intense persecution, Peter said this, humble yourselves therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time, he may exalt you, Casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you. Let's pray together. Majestic and merciful God, you see through the polished images we attempt to present you uncover the secret things of the heart. We confess that we are often insufficiently awed by your glory and so we come humbly seeking Your mercy trusting in your grace turning from ourselves into you. Give us a deep and abiding assurance of who you are and what you have done for us in Christ. It's in his name, we pray. Amen.