

Searching your family tree is literally a billion dollar industry. Back in 2012 the popular website Ancestry.com was sold to investors for the total of \$1.6 billion. The huge site just keeps chugging along helping over two million paying users investigate their family trees and their roots. Of course you notice I said paying users. If you want to get started the site will let you input information about relatives you already know for free. To see a family tree beyond your grandparents you have to sign up and pay. Even examining your roots costs something.

Boasting 12.7 billion records, even Ancestry.com can only go back so far. I don't know, maybe if I paid I would find out I was eighth cousin to some famous person. To really understand your roots you'd probably want to go back even further than any website or records search could take you. The people that Paul was writing about in the second lesson could trace their roots back centuries. It was impressive history, and they would be the first ones to tell you about it. And for that Paul was making mention of them.

Today on the last day of our Words of Romans summer series we go back to the beginning, we look at roots. We listen as Paul helps us understand what role those roots play in the lives of the Jews and also in our lives.

**Examine your roots  
Don't rely on them  
Find blessings in them**

The center of the news cycle these past few weeks on the international scene has been the war between Israel and Gaza. I know many of you probably tuned out any information about that war since those two always seem to be fighting. And as far as wars go this latest dustup has been light in comparison to some skirmishes between the two. In that part of the world it seems like you can't help but mention Israel. That little country has often been at the center of world history. Even the name of the country, Israel, calls to mind history that goes deeper and further back than just 1948.

A nation called Israel has often enjoyed premier status in the world. Today's Israelites enjoy national pride much like any other country. But there's something about the pride within Israel, within Jews, that runs deeper. Their pride rests on history older than any other country and people. It's based on their roots. Israel and the Jews go back to the Old Testament of the Bible, over 4,000 years ago. At that time Israel enjoyed advantages under God since they were formed by God. Ultimately it was the history that many Jews came to rely on as their connection to God. As the centuries unfolded Israelites kept coming back to their ancestors, the covenants with God, and their system of laws. They figured these made them special before God. These would be the reason for every last Jewish person getting to heaven.

The Apostle Paul easily identified with the Jews. He was born one of them. He relied on those very same things. He prided himself in keeping the Law of Moses. He rested secure in the temple worship. He appreciated the covenants with God. Each gave him a source of pride and accomplishment. Simply being Jewish meant he had God's favor. Lineage, Jewish roots, those were important. Paul's position changed though. He came to see Israel as a lost nation, apart from God. **"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart."** It tore at him to see a whole nation of his people abandoning God because they relied on their roots.

Six years in Oklahoma City and I feel like I have some roots. That's deeper than having a regular grocery store, dentist, and favorite restaurants. Roots are having a house we've now lived in longer than any other place in our marriage. Roots is being part of organizations like the NW Chamber, working to improve Oklahoma City. Roots means knowing the tourist places but not feeling like a tourist when we take family there. Roots feel comfortable. I had roots in the church where I grew up. I was fourth generation in that church that had been around 150 years. Roots like that feel comfortable. Comfortable is good until you're just a member because parents and grandparents were. Identifying yourself as a Lutheran on Facebook or your car is good. Until being Lutheran is more important than knowing and studying what the Bible says. Having a church home is great. Until you've chosen it based on worship style or trying to compromise and find some middle ground with a spouse, rather than focusing on what's taught. Just have some roots, be a member, just believe something, get comfortable. When these happen you may have started to rely on your roots.

Every advantage the Jews had were not given to them to hold on to as if they were the lifeboat. Those advantages were given so they could identify the lifeboat when it showed up. The Law of Moses they received convicted them of their sins so they would recognize it wasn't by their own doing they survived or were saved. It required God's intervention. Seeing the glory of God and being adopted as God's children allowed them to know that God had intervened. The covenants and the worship practices all were designed by God to point ahead to the Messiah, the promised Savior of the world. And one promise said it would be from within their own nation that this Messiah would come.

Their roots were for confidence that God was working out their salvation. Their roots were meant to strengthen their relationship with God and continue to focus on his promises to them. Instead they took their roots, the Law, the two sided agreements, and the worship in the temple, and they saw them as what was going to save them. These were their birthright. They were Jews, the most important people in the world because God chose them. They came to rely on their roots when they should've been finding blessings in them.

The roots of the Jewish nation, religion, and culture point directly to the Messiah. Everything is meant to be a big identifying marker. God didn't want anyone to miss the Messiah when he finally sent him into the world. Through the nation of Israel God gave these roots which were really blessings. **"Theirs is the adoption as sons; 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 Christ, who is God over all."** Everything in the Old Testament that the Jews received from God was a blessing because all of it pointed to the Messiah, Christ Jesus.

Your lineage might disappoint. Mom and dad likely weren't famous. Stretching back generations you might find no one of real importance. Your lineage may have even worked against you if parents weren't church goers, if no one in your family ever went to Bible study, or even cracked a Bible to read it. What blessings could roots like that offer?

Don't look at your roots to save you. Circumstances in life, having good or bad parents those don't save you. Don't look at your membership or lineage to save you. Look at your Savior. By grace you have a Savior in Jesus who worked in your heart to overcome your unbelief. He brought you to trust in him. He showed you the Old Testament and how it all pointed to him. He convinced you of the adoption by which God made you his brother or sister. He assured you the covenant with God is one sided and it relies completely on his life, death, and resurrection. The Law of Moses is meant not as a tool by which you can be saved but rather as a way by which you can know you need saving. Worship points to Jesus. And the promises point to him too. He is your perfect Savior. Forget about your roots and focus on your Savior.

With your focus clearly on Christ Jesus you might feel the same sorrow Paul did about his people. You probably know people who don't know Jesus and don't have those same blessings you do. They may not have roots in the Christian church. They may have had a situation that caused them to run away from the church. Whatever their roots it's not too late. It's not about their roots. It's about Christ. Lead them to hear the promises of the Old Testament blessings the people of Israel received. Lead them to see the Son of God who came from among the Jews to save all people. That person you care about can still hear what Christ gives to them as blessings. Adoption, grace, mercy, glory, promises, and worship. It all comes from God and it all points to Christ.

It's the great thing about life, everyone has a place where they came from. Everyone has someone they came from. That gives you roots. Sometimes they're good, sometimes not. Sometimes they're fascinating and other times they're blah. Whatever your roots, don't rely on them to save you. See them as blessings that point you to the Savior. Through Jesus you're connected to a long line of believers stretching through history. Those are your roots. Christ is your roots, by which you are saved.