

We all want to know how to be saved. Deep down that's the burning question. Now you might be thinking more about how to support your kids in college or how you're going to make the mortgage payment. But when faced with death we want to know that there's more than just this. How to be saved confronts every single person. That yields plenty of data throughout history to study. Paul directs our attention today to just one group. They form the basis for our case study in salvation.

I don't think Paul set out to write a case study. He wasn't some researcher preparing a paper to deliver at a university. Rather he's an apostle reflecting on the wonderful things God has done. Earlier in his letter he reviewed people, who they are and what that prompted God to do. He explored how this makes people react. Finally he took people to the top and shouted that nothing would be able to separate them from the love of God in Christ. That was chapter one through eight of Romans. Now in chapter nine, the second lesson, he digs in to what could be considered...

**A case study in salvation: the Jews**  
**Privileges can't save you**  
**Promises do save you**

Centuries ago the Jews as a nation and culture didn't exist. Completely by God's doing the people were selected and moved through history. Coming from one person, it was easy to track who was a Jew. Everyone who was a Jew could say they were part of a handpicked special group. You'd think that being chosen by God would mean all of them were bound for heaven's glory. Not so. It wasn't because they lacked privileges.

Paul reviews the privileged history of the Jews. **"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."** The Jews were considered God's sons and daughters. God lived among them. They received the Law of Moses directly from God on the mountain. God made exclusive agreements with them only. They even had a special place to come and be close to God on earth in the temple. People like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Noah were in their lineage. And if all that wasn't enough, from out of their lineage you could trace the ancestry of Christ.

Quite the list of privileges those Jews had. Not sure anyone here can match it. That doesn't mean we haven't enjoyed privileges. You know yours. You live in a country where you don't fear starvation and you don't fear religious persecution. In some way you came to be connected with a Bible believing Christian church. You are part of a congregation that enjoys the privilege of a school. Maybe you didn't have God making personal covenants with you or giving you the Law of Moses. But the privileges you did have, are you treating them like the Jews did? Are you counting on them to save you, as if a former connection with a Christian church will be your ticket into heaven? Are you rejecting the teaching of your youth thinking it doesn't matter anyway? Or are you just not making use of the privileges like the school or regular worship? The privileges will not save you. But rejecting them or turning away from them also puts us into danger.

Just thinking about the Jews rejection made Paul beside himself. **"I speak the truth in Christ, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race."** Paul couldn't believe the privileges they had; a God close by, a personal relationship with him, a special temple, and a lineage to the Messiah. None of it was enough to save them if they rejected.

Now the reason for the case study of the Jews is clear. It applies to us too. You have privileges. Plenty of things have gone right in your life to get to this place. A God close by, a personal relationship with him, and a special place to worship him. But maybe like the Jews you'll lose sight of what's really important. Maybe you'll stop caring about God all together thinking you can do it on your own if you're so privileged. But which privilege could ultimately save you? Not one.

Paul was willing to sacrifice himself and his spot in heaven to connect his fellow Jews with Christ. There's the key; a connection with Christ. Paul points us to Christ. Jesus did more than just talk about trading places with you. He came to this earth to make it happen. He took his divine authority and marched straight to the cross. There he raised himself up to die where you belonged. He paid for your sins when you couldn't. He traded his heavenly home for a wooden cross so you wouldn't have to face death but could go to your heavenly home. Privileges can't save you. You have a Savior, a death, a resurrection which really saves.

The doctor prescribes each medication to you with the full expectation that it is going to help you get better. Otherwise what's the point? If it doesn't work the doctor would be foolish to give you the same medicine again. The Jews were specially called by God and had privileges like no other nation on earth. Yet many of them were dying without faith. Many rejected the Messiah. Did they need a different medicine? Was God's Word ineffective? **"It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel."** The privileges weren't enough. Just calling themselves Jews wasn't enough. Israel, the true Israel made up of all believers in Christ, is built on something else. Only the promises of God can save.

Paul shows us the case study to illustrate. Abraham had two children and from Abraham came the entire Jewish nation. People born into Abraham's family tree of the Jews thought they were special. Ishmael was Abraham's first natural child. Certainly he would have to be special. But being Abraham's firstborn didn't guarantee the line of the Savior. **"On the contrary, it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."** Being the natural born child of Abraham wasn't enough to save anyone, not by God's standards. Abraham was promised many offspring, but they wouldn't be children of natural descent. Abraham's offspring would be children based on the promise.

Isaac was the child God promised Abraham he would have. Isaac was the one through whom the line of the Savior would go. That was the promise God would fulfill in Abraham and his descendants. The promise of the Savior through Isaac is the promise that saved Abraham. It was the promise that saved everyone who believed in that promise after Abraham. Those that believe are the true children of Abraham regardless of their nationality. The promise of the Savior is the promise of free grace in Christ. It throws open the possibilities for us who aren't natural children of Abraham. The promise saves us. The promise brings us into God's family by grace in Christ through faith.

That promise means every other promise of God to you will also come true. The promise to lift your sins through the cross has come true. You're freed from that burden. The promise God made to raise you from the dead is still to come. But knowing that frees you to cast all your cares on God because he's planning a resurrection for you. And God promises to prepare a place in heaven for us. This promise keeps us living and walking the narrow road. Sometimes the narrow road looks deserted but we confidently walk on it anyway. We travel it with the full knowledge the promises of God are not only supporting us but carrying us heavenward. The promises are what save us.

Human beings learn a lot by exploring what happened to others. Unlike the Titanic we would not sail at full speed the Northern Atlantic in the middle of April without having some assurance there were no icebergs ahead. We build levies bigger and stronger now knowing that those "once in a hundred year" storms do come around like Katrina. And we don't rely on privileges to save us eternally like the Jews. We live for the promises of God. Stopping to examine the case study of the Jews helps us see that only the promises of God in Christ will save us.