



## “Called as Vessels of Mercy”<sup>1</sup>

### Romans 9:24-29

Have you ever gone on a trip and had expectations of what’s going to happen? Of course. We often do, right? You plan for a vacation. You think about all the things you’re going to do. You imagine going on the trip. Everybody in your mind are smiling. You’re relaxing. It’s sunny, but not too hot. You can’t wait to get there because this vacation is going to be the answer to all the stress that has built up over the course of the year.

Then the actual trip happens.

You get a headache for a couple days. It rains at least one whole day. Someone gets into an argument with someone else. There’s tension. And, in the midst of all of this, you’re getting angrier and angrier, not simply because these things are happening, but because *your* plans failed. This doesn’t seem fair. You’ve worked hard. You don’t believe you deserve any of this! So, a whole other day is ruined because you’ve been sulking. Does any of this sound familiar to anyone here?

Now, let me ask you a question: did your plans changing make the world come to a halt? Did your plans changing change the course of the cosmos? Did your plans changing affect every single human being on the planet? Please say no.

Why didn’t your plans affect the cosmos? Because your plans are not ultimate. But let me ask you this: What if God were to change his plans? What if he made a promise 1,000 years ago that today he decides to change course on? Or, what if God makes plans, but his plans could change because human beings do different things and thwart what he was going to do?

If God’s plans could change, would that affect you and me? Would it affect everyone in the world? Would it affect the cosmos? Absolutely – in every way – because God is the Creator. Or, as Paul said last week, God is the potter. Everything else is clay.

God is *that* important. And, Paul emphasizes in Romans 9 the complete freedom of God to make whatever decision he wants. If God doesn’t have complete freedom, then creation is doomed. If God doesn’t have complete freedom, we cannot be assured of every promise God has made in Romans (and in the entire Bible).

Ok, I think we get this, but why do I bring this up now? It’s because of how Paul is talking in Romans. Coming to the end of Romans 8, people could be wondering about the trustworthiness of God’s promises. So many promises Paul guarantees to the church were promised to Jews in the Old

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript is still in the rough draft phase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

Testament. The Jewish people could be thinking, “Hold on! But what about us? If God doesn’t keep his promises to us, then the Gentiles have no hope.” So, Paul goes back to the Old Testament to discover what God really said. In looking at God’s promise to Abraham – and even how God chose Jacob and not Esau, we see that God makes promises to Israel, but the promise was not that every biological child of Abraham would be saved. In case we think this is unfair or something God wouldn’t want, Paul moves into Pharaoh and shows how God is glorified in the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. Through judgment, mercy and glory are seen. But then Paul moves a little bit off-track at this point. Paul answers our feelings of injustice at God being glorified in judging. And then Paul shows us the mystery of the eternal glories of God in doing whatever he pleases! In showing us this, we are reminded again that God keeps his promises.

But when we hear Paul say that God makes vessels of wrath and hardens hearts and chooses Jacob over Esau before they did anything; and we think, “That’s not fair!” Often, in the discussion of Romans 9, people try to fight for their rights. But, it’s in Romans 9 that Paul is essentially saying, “What about God’s rights?!” If human beings believe that God owes them *anything*, then mercy is no longer mercy because now it’s owed to them. Paul’s already shown us that human beings are more sinful than we want to admit – and that every human deserves condemnation because of their sinfulness!

Why do we get mad at God for being completely free to do whatever he pleases? I think, at least in one sense, people are angry because they say, “I have to make a choice!” But earlier in this book, Paul says that all humans are bound to sin unless God frees them and binds us to himself. And, in Romans 8, Paul writes that “. . .**the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.**”<sup>2</sup> Paul’s talking about everyone who does not trust Jesus. And he says that not only *do they not submit to God*, but that they *cannot* submit to God. Humanity’s sinfulness means that we will only ever and always reject God unless God comes in and rescues us. So, **if people want to fight for their right to choose, they are fighting for a place in Hell.**

We ought to trust and rest in God’s absolute power to make plans and keep them. If God doesn’t keep his plans, everything falls apart! So, in Romans 9, Paul confronts our beliefs and says that God being absolutely free is the only way anyone can have mercy. In his freedom, he punishes sinners because of their sinfulness – which all humans deserves – and then he shows mercy – which no one deserves. But mercy is not mercy if it’s deserved. And, mercy is not mercy if there’s no judgment. As a result of recognizing God’s power to judge and power to give mercy, then our response ought to be one of immense humility and appreciation of God. God’s plans are never thwarted. He doesn’t submit to us. He doesn’t change because of our changes. He’s over all.

Again, the reason Paul’s highlighting these truths is because the question people are wondering here in Romans 9 is, “Does God keep his promises to his people (Jews and Gentiles)?” So, Paul is seeking to encourage believers that God is trustworthy. And God is trustworthy because God is absolutely free! He does whatever he pleases. As Paul moves forward now, he is getting back to his point. God keeps his promises to Israel, and he also keeps his promises to Gentiles. In this text, Paul is paving the way for chapters 10 and 11. So, if you haven’t already, turn in your Bibles to Romans 9:24. Let’s pray together before we read. [Pray for the Martins and also for Matt Nuiver from Faith United Reformed.]

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:7.

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*<sup>24</sup> even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?  
<sup>25</sup> As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’  
and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’ ” <sup>26</sup> “And in the very place where it  
was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living  
God.’ ” <sup>27</sup> And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of  
Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, <sup>28</sup> for the Lord  
will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” <sup>29</sup> And as Isaiah  
predicted, <sup>30</sup> “If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like  
Sodom and become like Gomorrah.” <sup>3</sup>*

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The title for the sermon this morning is, “Called as Vessels of Mercy.” The reason for this title is because the word “call” is found multiple times, and Paul is now talking about those whom God has decided to make vessels of mercy. As I said earlier, Paul is addressing the reality that God keeps his promises. We know this is the case because Paul now will quote from the prophets as Old Testament evidence as to what God’s intentions has been regarding the salvation of Jews and Gentiles. Paul started by going back to Abraham. Then Moses. Now, Paul’s look at the prophets and what God promises through them. In Verses 24-29, Paul shows that God has been consistent all along.

I think the big idea of these verses is that **God planned to call many undeserving Gentiles and a remnant of undeserving Jews.** This is essentially the thesis given in verse 24. God has called people not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles. But keep in mind, everyone who is rescued by God is undeserving; therefore, salvation is all of God’s mercy. I also want to note the word “call.” In three verses, Paul uses it four times. And, it’s notable because when Paul quotes from Hosea, he actually changes the word in Hosea to this Greek word for “call.” It’s not that Paul changes the meaning of the verses, but instead, Paul is showing that whenever God speaks to do something, he is effective. As a matter of fact, this word for call could be translated effective call. “Even us, whom he has effectively called.”

Think of it this way. This illustration can break down, but I think you’ll get the idea. I have a dog. He’s part husky. From day one of having him, he treated me like the Alpha of the pack. When we let him outside, he can meander around and sometimes my kids will call him: MARLON! COME! He just stares. They yell some more. He stares. Then they say, “Dad, can you call Marlon?” I whistle. He comes running. I have an effective whistle. This somewhat fits the idea of God’s effective call. However, God’s call is stronger! My dog could still resist. But when God effectively calls, it *will* come to being. When he said “Let there be light,” light came into being. When God says to your soul, “Let there be life,” there will be life! So, when Paul moves to talk about God saving Gentiles, and he quotes Hosea, he wants the readers to recognize that God doesn’t simply make plans and then depend on us to trust him. God’s speech is an effective call and God saves his vessels of mercy!

Or, if I can give a different illustration. Have you ever called a disobedient child to you? They refuse to come to you! You can say, “Come here,” but if they’re defiant enough, they won’t come. They may even run. This is not the idea of the word “call” here. The word “call” is whoever God calls comes with willing and repentant hearts.

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<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 9:24–29.

So, now we can go into the quotations from the prophets.

### 1. God designed to call many of the undeserving Gentiles (vv. 25-26).

Let's read verses 25-26 again: As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" "And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" <sup>4</sup>

Paul is not *directly* quoting from Hosea here. In some ways it's a paraphrase. He switches around phrases and changes the word "say" to "call." But the points and ideas remain the same. That said, you could say, "Nowhere does it say that Paul is talking about Gentiles here." And to that, I would agree.

So, why do I say these verses are speaking to Gentiles? Well, look at the beginning of verse 27. "And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel. . . ." Paul says in verse 24 that God has called from the Jews and Gentiles. Verse 27 is quoted as a reference to Jews. Therefore, who are verses 25-26 talking about? Clearly, the Gentiles.

But to add some confusion to this, Paul is quoting from a passage from Hosea that actually, in context, is God talking to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He refers to the northern kingdom as "not my people." He refers to them as "not-pitied." If this is the context of Hosea's words, then why is Paul applying this to the Gentiles? There are two possible answers that I prefer.

The first is that God has always loved calling those who we think are least likely. Think of Nineveh. Think of Abraham. Think of Moses. Think of David. These were all people you wouldn't expect as God's chosen. Well, if God did that for these people, and even for the Northern Kingdom, then why should we be shocked that God is going to save Gentiles?!

This is one view, and I think it's a very convincing one. However, Paul's been using the Old Testament to *prove* that God would keep his promises. And this promise seems geared toward Israelites. So, we have a second view. This second view is the recognition that Israel was always intended to be a picture to the world. In Romans 3:19, we read that the law was given to those under the law (the Jews) so that *every* mouth would be stopped. Interesting. Paul writes to his readers that they all know this. How God has acted towards Israel is a picture to the world! Therefore, God's work with the Northern Kingdom can be applied to Gentiles.

So, let's look at what God does for Gentiles. And, for the sake of explanation, a Gentile is anyone who is a non-Jew. You should care about what God says here because most of you here have no Jewish descent. You're a Gentile. Has God promised to save people who are non-Jewish or has God decided to only focus on Israel?

Well, clearly God has decided to save the unlikely and undeserving from even the Gentiles. I love this news, Ventura. Maybe I love this because I was never really the popular kid in school. It wasn't that I had no friends. I had my friends, but I was in the second tier, maybe. But, when it came to sports, I was the bottom of the barrel. I often hated gym class, unless we played volleyball. For whatever reason, I can hit a ball! But when it came to other sports, they'd have the two leaders and those two leaders would pick all the other kids. I would simply be excited if I wasn't last picked. But I'm sure I was picked last.

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<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 9:25–26.

You know, sometimes when it comes to God, we can tend to think that God chooses us based on our ability. How good to you read your Bible? How much praying do you do? Well, you're top-tier popular Christian! You're on God's team. Congratulations! But that's not how God works. Every human being is undeserving. Every Gentile is undeserving. And, from a Jewish perspective, the salvation of Gentiles is unlikely. According to one commentator I read this past week "Most Jews expected a few Gentiles to be saved and many Jews, but the initial response to the gospel has been precisely the reverse" (Schreiner, p. 529).

Paul emphasizes this to the Corinthian church: <sup>26</sup> **For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.** <sup>27</sup> **But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;** <sup>28</sup> **God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,** <sup>29</sup> **so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.** <sup>30</sup> **And because of him you are in Christ Jesus. . . .**<sup>5</sup>

If I can word it this way, God chooses the last picked! Now, this makes me rejoice. Some of you might be mad. If that's you, maybe re-evaluate who you really are as a human. Yes, you are created in the image of God, but as a sinner, you have committed high treason against the immortal, all-powerful, holy Creator who owns everything and gives all things their breath. You are not impressive when you come face-to-face with God. As a rebel, you do not deserve mercy. You deserve punishment. This is what Paul's getting at in quoting Hosea. Those who are called "not my people" and "not beloved" will experience a reversal.

To not be God's people means you are rejected. To not be loved by God is not merely to be tolerated, but to be rejected. Oh, how contrary this runs to our culture. We live in a day and age where people believe that the automatic preset of a human being is being his child and loved. The Scriptures reveal otherwise. The automatic preset is not beloved. If you have not turned to Jesus for forgiveness and mercy, then you are still living in rebellion against God. You've been using everything for yourself, not for God's glory.

Well, if that's what humans are – and if that's how Gentiles live – then where's the hope? Our only hope is in God and his effective call. Hosea says that those who were "not my people" will be called "my people." When God declares something to be something, it is that thing. So, this is talking about God declaring salvation over people. He prophesies that among the Northern Kingdom, and thus throughout the world, there are going to be people who were *not* his people, and he is going to adopt them into his family, making them his children.

But even as you hear this, you could think, "Ok, but what's the big deal about being adopted into God's family?" For some, the term adoption brings many blessings with it. People I know who have been adopted and praise the Lord for his grace! For others, the term has a sting with it for various reasons, and I want to be sensitive to that. In addition, others have grown up in systems or homes where you had an abusive parent; so, having God as Father doesn't sound appealing.

This is where the next term comes in. To those who are not beloved, I will call "beloved." If you have not turned to Jesus for reconciliation with God and forgiveness of sins, then you don't know the reality of

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<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 1:26–30.

love. You may think you know love. You may experience degrees of human love, but human love is meant to point to a greater love – the love of God. To be called “beloved” is a supreme blessing!

This past week, I had a conversation with my youngest daughter, Karis, and she was telling us how she needed new shoes. Keep in mind, she loves shoes. When she was two, for that birthday, she only wanted shoes. She got 10 pairs of shoes and was in ecstasy! But, this past week, when she was talking about needing new shoes, I conceded that she had many that were either too small or too big. So, we went to Old Navy and looked for some shoes. I let her get two pair. Once we got home, she showed them off, and then at one point, she was sitting on the floor with her shoes, hugged them and said, “Oh, my beloved!” I didn’t even know she knew that word. Another older child said, “I don’t even know what that means!” But her response revealed she knew. “Beloved” is to love something dearly, tenderly, immensely and intensely!

God loves us more than my daughter loves her shoes. To go from being unloved and bound in sinfulness to being dearly loved and a part of the Father’s family is the difference between death and life, darkness and light, misery and perfect joy!

This is what God delights in doing. He delights taking those who don’t deserve, those who seem unlikely even, and making them his own. So listen carefully, Ventura, if you have trusted Jesus, praise God for his work of mercy in your life. Praise God for bringing you into his family and giving you life and *love*. He embraces you and calls you his beloved! And, as Paul goes on to say, you are now sons of the living God.

Which, from my understanding, this means we have all the rights and privileges of being in God’s family. In Roman thought, a son had all rights and privileges, not daughters. But Paul says to all Gentile believers, God brings men and women into experience all the privileges of sonship! REJOICE! This has been God’s plan all along. Praise his name.

So, think of the Roman church. In that Roman church, there were probably more Gentiles than Jews in that gathering. Has God failed his promises to the Jews because there are more Gentiles? No. God had always planned to save the unlikely and reach out to the entire world. His story with the Jews was a pointer of what he was going to do for the world – and through Abraham all the nations of the world would be blessed! God keeps his promises. Not one has been thwarted, and, in fact, all of his promises remain intact.

Now, what about the Jews? That’s the next point:

## 2. God designed to save a remnant of undeserving Jews (vv. 27-29).

Let’s read verses 27-29 again: <sup>27</sup> And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, <sup>28</sup> for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” <sup>29</sup> And as Isaiah predicted, <sup>q</sup>“If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.”<sup>6</sup>

Are all Jews guaranteed salvation? No. They had a fatal belief. They thought that being born into Judaism guaranteed they were “good” with God. What Paul’s been saying here is that **“physical descent from Abraham not only does not guarantee inclusion in the true people of God; it is not even**

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<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 9:27–29.

**necessary**” (Moo, p. 610). But some could think, “Well, if physical descent doesn’t matter, then I guess God’s rejected Israel!” That’s a wrong conclusion.

Just because God hasn’t worked according to our plans doesn’t mean he’s not working according to his plans! And, it also doesn’t mean his plans do *not* include Jewish people. Generally, the people thought that being of physical descent meant you were “in.” But the news is harder to take. Paul doesn’t say that most or all Jews will come to faith in Jesus. Instead, he says that a remnant will come. That may be a large number, but percentage-wise, it’s probably not the majority of Israelites.

Now, if you want to say “no fair,” or “why?” Go back to the beginning of Romans 9 and re-read until you embrace and believe what God says. I’m not going to review here, but I’d encourage you to continue to wrestle with the Lord and submit to his good, sovereign will. All I will say is that God saving *any* Jew is mercy.

We continue to get angry at God for *not* saving everyone, but I’m convinced that if we knew the holiness of God, knew our utter depravity and knew our worthiness for God’s just wrath, we wouldn’t be saying, “No fair” when God doesn’t save more, we would be saying, “Why has God chosen to save any?” Salvation is mercy. It’s undeserved. The fact that he doesn’t bring eternal punishment to all is a glorious mystery. The fact that he saves so many is wondrous!

But ponder further. The fact that God the Son came to this world and experienced an eternity’s worth of wrath for myriads upon myriads of people on the cross should cause our hearts to melt like wax before God. Why would God do this for sinners and rebels? Why would he exercise such profound love? Praise God for his mercy and grace!

So, let’s not say, “No fair.” Instead, let’s rejoice in the sovereign grace of our Lord. And, let’s admit that no one deserves mercy – including Israel. Paul says that even though the sons of Israel number the sands of the sea, only a remnant will be saved. That means that not all Israel is reconciled with God. Then, in verse 28, we have an intriguing statement. It sounds confusing to me, and I’ll admit that I don’t fully understand what is being said here, but I’ll give my idea at this point. Paul says, “for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” The word “for” harkens back to what was just said about God’s statement regarding Israel, and then moves into God’s “sentence,” which refers to judgment. We see here that in Israel, God both judges and gives mercy. Like with God’s choice of Isaac and not Ishmael or Jacob and not Esau or Israel and not Egypt. But we learn to appreciate the glory of God’s grace to Isaac, Jacob and Israel by contrasting it with the judgment. So we see here within Israel.

God will judge many in Israel as sinners condemned, and Paul says that this judgment will come on the earth swiftly and without delay. The terms here don’t have to reference immediacy of time from the writing of it. It can mean that it will come suddenly and fully. When the full remnant of Israel comes in, then God’s judgment will come and it will be full! Ventura, do you realize that there’s a remnant left from Israel? Jesus hasn’t come back yet because the remnant has not reached its total yet!

Even here, at this point, we see that God has always planned to save a remnant. From Abraham, through Moses to the prophets, God has promised to save a remnant – not all physical Israel. And, God has gone so far as to show us that he ordained to save people from every tribe, nation and tongue while saving a remnant from Israel.

You'd think at this point we could end the sermon, but verse 29 serves as a transition and springboard into the rest of chapter 9 and on into 10 and 11. So, verse 29 says, <sup>7</sup>“*And as Isaiah predicted, “If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring, we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.”*”

This quotation is from Isaiah 1:9. Paul quotes exactly from the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Notice that the word “offspring” is here and earlier in this chapter, Paul’s spoken about how not all the physical offspring (or, seed) of Abraham are the spiritual offspring of Abraham. And so Paul shows that in one of the greatest prophets, Isaiah, right at the beginning of his declarations, shows that God ordained for spiritual offspring in the midst of physical offspring.

Now, there’s a contrast Paul makes here as opposed to earlier in this chapter. In verses 7-9, Paul speaks more negatively regarding the offspring – only highlighting that not all offspring of Abraham are children of Abraham. But here, Paul shows how God’s judgment again always leads to mercy. Because there’s a spiritual Israel, of which a remnant of physical Israelites will be a part of, then God has not forsaken physical Israel.

Ventura, get this. **God’s judgment, in this creation, is always a platform for mercy.** Did you hear that? This chapter makes explicit that God’s judgment is always a platform for mercy. Paul takes our sense of fairness and justice and shows us that we don’t fully understand his ways. And, actually, since God is God, we won’t fully understand his ways. But Paul calls us to trust. Just because we can’t understand, doesn’t mean we can’t trust. In addition, Paul motivates us to trust by showing us that God is just and that in acting in justice, he paves the way for more mercy!

So, let me give an example. Think about the world in which we live now. Some Christians look around in fear at how scary things seem to be in our world. Practices of people around the globe can be truly horrifying. And then Christians sometimes just want to sink their heads in the sand. Or, they say things like, “God’s going to judge us?!” And they say it in fear! That’s not a fearful thing for us – and actually, God’s judgment could (and probably will) lead to the salvation of more people! We should rejoice when God judges.

And, this is what I think Paul is getting at with Israel. Isaiah says that if God had not promised to keep a remnant from Israel, then God would have done away with Israel like he had done with Sodom and Gomorrah. By the way, that means Israel is as wicked in heart (and at times actions) as Sodom and Gomorrah. This would have been an appalling statement to the people in Isaiah’s time, and in Paul’s time. And, it’s a shocking statement in our day. But God’s promise to keep a remnant means that God is also patient with national Israel until all the remnant come. This is what Paul will emphasize as we move on in Romans 10-11.

**As we ponder Paul’s words here again, we should be humbled and amazed at our God. We should also trust him. He keeps his promises. Everything he sets out to do, he accomplishes. In addition, we should rejoice in a mercy and grace that can save the worst sinners! If God had not saved us, we would have rejected him forever. But God planned to have vessels of mercy from Jews and Gentiles! Grow in gratitude if you’re a vessel of mercy.** And, if you have not trusted in Christ, I pray that you would turn to him today! Run to the Lord from his judgment to receive his mercy!

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<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 9:29.

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