



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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August 26, 2010
14th Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: [Romans 9:1-9](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Judges 7:1-8](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 72](#)
Gospel Lesson: [Luke 13:22-30](#)

God's Word Does Not Fail

Relying on birthright will fail
Relying on the promise will never fail

I think it was back when I was just about in high school. I just started high school, or was just about to start high school, somewhere in there, one of the biggest marketing failures that has ever happened in our country. I hated it. I hated every last minute of it. I loved Coke. I looked down my nose on Pepsi drinkers because I thought Coke was better. Then they went and changed Coke and brought out new Coke, and it kind of tasted like Pepsi. I thought that was kind of a slap in the face, so I was really thrilled when they came out with Coke Classic and got back to what I like. But as a business decision, new Coke I suppose was kind of along the lines of the Edsel and some of these other famous marketing failures. It was just a complete and absolute failure when you look back at it. You kind of shake your head and say "What were they thinking?"

Understand this...I understand failures. I know failure. I'm a Lions fan remember? So I'm familiar with failure and all of its various manifestations. Sometimes though you can be deceived. You can look at something and think it's a failure, but really it's not. It's not always as obvious as new Coke.

That's kind of along the lines of what Paul is addressing in these words that I just read to you. I think we can have some of the same questions that Paul was probably addressing in the people he was writing to, the Christians there in Rome. We look around and we see the Gospel being proclaimed. We see people that come to faith. Maybe we have come to faith and our life doesn't seem to change. In fact, sometimes it seems like we have even more struggles in our life. We face more challenges and we say, "What's the point? What difference does being a Christian make? It doesn't seem to make any difference. My life seems to be worse than that person over there who doesn't believe in Christ." Or we see the Word of God being proclaimed within a congregation and things don't seem to change. You just seem to keep going in deep ruts just because you are in the ruts, not because of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Sometimes you ask God why. It looks like a failure.

Paul is kind of addressing the same thing. He's looking at his people, the Jews. He sees the advantages they have. "Theirs" is the covenants, "theirs" the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. They are the people that had the up-close and personal promises of God in the encounters with God, with God appearing in the

pillar of fire at night and the pillar of cloud by day...God doing things like he did through Gideon that we just read about, where he defeats the Midianites with simply 300 men when he sends the thousands home because he doesn't want the people to think they are doing it. He wants them to know God has done it. They saw that over and over. They heard the prophets. They saw the miracles. Yet Paul would look around in his life and he would see that many, many, many of his people turned their back on Jesus because they wanted something different. They were expecting something different.

So he asked the question that was probably on their minds. "Does this mean that the Word of God has failed?" He said "no." God's Word does not fail. I don't care what it looks like at times. As we look at things, the problem then is really in us because we are looking for the wrong answers to the wrong questions. I think that's what we learn from this. That's something we probably have to keep in front of our eyes at times because there are times in our lives when we probably think being a Christian doesn't work because it's not guaranteeing peace on earth. When you look at it, we really see we're answering the wrong question.

You can see the anguish, you can feel the anguish, you can hear the anguish in these words as you read them of how desperate Paul was for his people, his people who had all these advantages to believe in Jesus. He's writing as one who at one time had attacked believers. He tried to separate them from Christ by threatening their very life. He was looked up to by many of his countrymen when he was doing that. Now that Jesus had literally shown him the light and blinded him on the way to Damascus, he had become this zealous proclaimer of the Gospel and he desperately wanted people to know Jesus and get closer to Jesus. Time after time he would go to a new city and he would preach at the synagogue, teach at the synagogue, take the readings, the scrolls, read it and say "Here's the answer boys. It's Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment of what this is talking about." Some would believe, but some would end up chasing him out of town, throwing rocks at him, trying to kill him, whatever the case may be.

Satan had to attack Paul at times and say, "Is it worth it? Are you just a failure because they aren't listening to you? They're chasing you out. There's no earthly glory here. There's no earthly prize. This isn't winning the lottery." Satan had to be tempting him just like I think he tempts a lot of us today. As we face difficulties or we face challenges, we sometimes say "Why God? I love you. I want to serve you. I do all these things. Why are you letting bad things happen to me? Go get Joe Blow. He's an idiot who doesn't love you. Let stuff happen to him. Why is it happening to me?" We're probably focused on the wrong question.

The question isn't, why doesn't God just do everything we think he should in this world, or why didn't he convert all the Israelites? The amazing question is, why did God save any? Why did Jesus die for everyone? Why did his Spirit work and convert any? Reality is that everyone of the Israelites was born in sin and separated from God just like you and I are born in sin and separated from God. I don't care how hard we try, what we think we do, we can't offer anything up to God. That's the whole point of Jesus saying the door is narrow. You can't get into the gates of heaven just by saying, "I was

born an Israelite.” You can’t get into the gates of heaven just by saying “My family was one of the founding families of Morrison Zion Lutheran Church.” You can’t get into heaven because you have a relationship with someone else who might know about God. The only way into heaven is Jesus and what he did for you...his life in your place, his death in your place. If you start going and just assume that God is love and God will let anyone into heaven and we get to God in the way that we know him and all this kind of post-modern garbage, the door is going to be shut and you’ll be left outside like Jesus talked about. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* ([John 14:6](#)). So if he said that, you can’t just say, “He was a revolutionary. He was a great teacher.” If he said that, he meant it. He did say it, and if you don’t believe that, then he’s only an idiot. But if he is what he says...he is the very Son of God who came to earth to live and die for our sins...then you have to take him at his word. He is the only way into heaven. Being born from the right family or going through the right motions, knowing when to stand and when to sit in a church service, that doesn’t open heaven. Jesus’ life and death in your place...that opens heaven. When Paul looked around, he saw many of the Jews just kind of pooh-poohing that as though it was nonsense. And it pained him.

Have you ever had that kind of pain? Have you ever cried out to God, “God, cut me off from you and take this person who I care about to heaven” that you’re worried doesn’t know God? If you have, that’s the kind of pain Paul was feeling. It led him to a lot of questions. But notice the answer he comes to. He says, “But it’s not as though the Word of God failed.” God’s Word was proclaimed to these people. It’s not a failure on the part of the Word of God that they didn’t listen. It’s a “them” problem. It’s not a God problem. It’s a “them” problem. He says, “Here’s how I know that the Word of God did not fail. Not all who are Israel, who are God’s people, who are born from Israel, are descendants of Abraham.” He said “We should have had an inkling of this when we read our Old Testament. All of us Jews that knew our Old Testament backwards and forwards, we should have had an inkling of this because God works by the promise, not by this birthright, not by what you do, not by observing the law. He works by the promise. Not because they are descendants of Abraham are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, God said it’s through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.”

Remember Abraham and Sarah? They didn’t have kids, they didn’t have kids, they didn’t have kids...God told them at 75, “you are going to have a kid, and that’s the one that the Messiah is going to be descended through.” Fifteen years later, he’s now 90 and there’s still no kid. So he sleeps with one of his servant girls and tries to have a child. He tried to take it in his own hands and conceive this offspring so that the Savior would come from his line. God said “No. It’s not through this guy. It’s through your own offspring. It’s through Isaac. I’m going to come back in a year and Sarah will have a child. You guys thought you were never going to have a child. She’s going to have a child and this will be my promise to you. That promise kept is what is going to bring about your salvation.” Paul is saying it’s the promise, those who believe God’s promises that are true Israel, those that are his family.

That's what Jesus was talking about when he talked about them coming from East, West, North and South...they'll come from all over, not just from the land of Israel, all those who the Spirit used the Word, the Spirit used the Sacraments, to lead people to believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. There will be people from all over, from outside the family of Israel, that will believe. And they then become spiritual Israel even though they are not physical descendants of Israel. They are God's chosen people, not by birth, but by God's choice in bringing us the gift of faith.

So the upshot of this...it becomes clear. Get closer to God and his promises. Know his promises. Rely on his promises. Don't rely on what your eyes can see. What your eyes can see is often going to be misery, heartache and disappointment. This side of heaven, in a sinful world, that's what we should expect.

Put your eyes on the prize that has been won by Jesus' life and death. Keep yourself focused on that promise and that truth. Then we are spiritual Israel and we have the peace that passes all understanding. It's not reasonable...it's divine. It's not of human decision...it's of God. That gives us the confidence to live for God and serve God because we know his promises never fail.