

To start off with today were going to play a guessing game! I'm thinking of a piece of paper and I want you to try and guess what it is. To help you out some clues are going to come up on the screen. (Keep people guessing until they get the right answer).

That's right, I'm thinking of a will. Now I found a list of common things that people leave to others in their wills. It includes things like possessions.....well actually that's really about it. You know normal stuff like cars, houses, money, shares, pets, half eaten ten year old sandwich.

So that got me thinking, if we can inherit all that our parents owned, is there anything we can't inherit? I mean we even inherit some of our parents traits like what we look like and how we act. So is there anything that our parents can't pass down to us?

Paul tells us in this passage there is something we can't inherit. We can't inherit God. We are told that our parents can't simply pass on their religion to us for our entire lives. There must come a point where we are willing to declare our faith in God and it is only through this faith that we can be saved.

Paul begins this look into inheriting God by looking at what saves the Jews. What Paul tells us is that just being a Jew doesn't mean that you will be automatically saved. To be saved a Jew must have faith in God.

He begins by asking his audience a question: Has God rejected the Jews? After all, as Paul explained in the previous chapter, they continued to ignore and disobey him. Paul tells us that in spite of this, God had not rejected his people. He gives the example of the 7,000 people in Elijah's time who God still called his children. Despite the majority of the Jews rebelling and worshipping Baal, there are these 7,000 who God had reserved for himself. What does Paul say is important about these 7,000 though? Why are they still considered to be the people of God when the rest of the Jews had been rejected? Paul continues his example in vs. 4 "I have reserved 7,000 who **have not bowed the knee to Baal**". These 7,000 were still counted as God's people because they still had faith in God, not because they were from the Jewish race.

So what's the difference here? Why was simply being Jewish not enough for God? Why did a Jew have to have faith to be saved?

It's the difference between being part of a group and being committed to the cause of a group. Take for example a family owned fast food restaurant. The owner of the shop, the father, had a goal he wanted to work towards. The goal was to expand and plant a new shop. Now there were two sons who worked for their father. The first son shared this vision. He wanted to see the business expand and so he worked round the clock to see this goal achieved. He was dedicated to both his family, but also to the goal of the business. The second son was not as committed as the first. He saw his job at the shop as just that, a job. He didn't care about the goal or about his father. He just showed up each day, did what he had to and left. While he was still part of the family, he didn't share the goal of the family.

It was the same with the Jews. There were those who loved God and who were faithful to him and wanted to see his goals achieved. But then there were the others, who saw being Jewish as an inheritance, nothing more.

In this beginning passage of Romans 11 Paul tells his readers that family ties and race are completely useless before God. It was, and is, only by faith that a Jew is saved. So important is belief and faith to God that he cuts out of the Jews every single one who does not believe. Jews are saved by faith, not by family.

So after dealing with the Jews Paul shifts his focus to the gentile question – how are gentiles to be saved?

Paul tells us that just as Jews are saved by faith, so too are the Gentiles. He explains this by comparing the family of God to an olive tree. The natural branches of this tree are the Jews and the unnatural, those that are grafted on, are the gentiles. Paul describes this in vs 17 “.....and you, have been grafted in among the others”. The question is what qualifies a gentile for grafting? What is it about a person that lets them become part of God’s people? Read with me Romans 11: 20 “But they were broken off because of unbelief and you **STAND BY FAITH**”. Just like the Jews, nothing outside of faith could save the Gentiles. Paul, however, does not just leave it there. He reminds his readers that faith doesn’t just mean we can be grafted into God’s people, but it is also by faith that we remain a part of God’s people.

It’s like becoming a citizen of another country. There are certain requirements that you need to meet before you can become a fully fledged member of the community. In Australia’s case before you can become a citizen you need understand things like Australia’s values, our history and culture and the responsibilities that come with being a citizen. This privilege however can be lost. If an Australian citizen becomes a citizen of another country, then they cease to be an Australian citizen. Likewise if they commit a crime such as treason, their citizenship can be renounced

As Christians we are citizens of the Kingdom of God and it is our faith which allows for this. If we go back to being citizens of the world, back to our old way of life of sin, then we forfeit our “Kingdom citizenship”. If we lose our faith in God, then our citizenship is renounced.

Just as the only way that Jews could and can be saved is through faith, so to Gentiles can only be saved through faith. Family. Connections. Good deeds. None of these enter into salvation. God only cares about our faith. And when we lose it, when we begin to rely on other things to keep us in God’s people, we are cut from the tree. Paul tells us this in vs 21 “For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.” If we lose our faith, we will be cutoff, just as the Jews are cutoff when they lose their faith. We are counted as God’s people and we remain among them by our faith alone.

It’s easy to ask then, if God is prepared to cutoff people from his family, who does he actually want to save? Everybody! He WANTS to save everyone. But not everyone will be saved.

Paul tells us in vs. 26 that God desires all Israel to be saved. But who is included in this Israel? Does it mean only Jews will be saved, as they are the earthly nation of Israel? No. Paul has already made it clear

that there are Jews who won't be saved. He has also made clear that there are Gentiles who are saved through faith. So what is this Israel that is to be saved? The Israel that Paul speaks of is the believers. Those faithful to God. Those on the olive tree who stand by faith. This is the true Israel. And it is these who God will save.

It's like a farmer when it comes round to the time of a harvest. All year round he has been working hard on his crops. All year round he has been looking after them. He has put countless hours of effort and work into them and so, when the time comes, he wants to harvest every individual grain, every individual fruit. But it never works out that way. Throughout the year there are those that fall off the tree, there are those that are eaten by birds or insects, and there are those that are thrown away after they are harvested. God is the same. God has put all he is into us. He made us. He loves and cares for us more than we will ever be able to understand. He sent his son to die for us. And so he wants to see us all saved. But because of unbelief, there are those who won't be saved.

God wants to save everyone. He does. Unless people believe, unless they put their faith in him, they won't be. God wants to include everyone in the world regardless of their culture, of their race or their language. But unless they believe and trust in him they won't be saved. The true Israel, the Israel that is to be saved, is made of those who believe and have faith in God, not those who trust in their race or family.

This passage is all about assumption. It is about the assumption of the Jewish people that they would be saved because of their race. It is about the assumption of the Gentiles who thought that being grafted onto the tree meant you would be there forever, even if you gave up believing. It is about our assumption when we, or when people we know, say that they are Christian only because their family is or because it was the thing to do when they were growing up.

As we begin to go out to our neighbors in the Waitara area in the wake of Connect 09 there will be those who will claim to be Christian. But these people often base their "Christianity" on the assumption that they inherit it from their parents. They base their Christianity on the assumption that they have gone to Church all their lives or that they went to Sunday school as a child. What Paul tells us here though is that they are in desperate need of hearing the true gospel.

So when you're out door knocking and someone tells you that they're Christian, remember that the only way for someone to be a true Christian is through faith. Dig a little deeper, find out what it is that they base their Christianity on, and if it is anything other than faith, share the true gospel with them so that they might be saved.