

SERMON NOTES

June 27, 2010

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“Who Are the People of God?”

Matthew 3:1, 7-10; 7:21-28; Romans 9:1-5; 10:1-4; 11:1-6

1. General Assembly of the PC(USA), Minneapolis, July 3-10, 2010

Controversial Issues:

1. Marriage and Civil Unions.
2. Revision of Constitution (book of Order)
3. Middle East Peacemaking.
4. Ethical Investment matters for Presbyterian Retirement Funds /Presbyterian Foundation.
5. *Theological relationship between Christians and Jews*

2. Key Salvation Question in the 21st century?

. . . probably *“How can I be sure that I will get to heaven when I die?”*
(highly individualistic)

3. Key Salvation Question #1 in 1st century?

“How can I know that I belong to the people of God?”
(corporate) . . . speaks of the need to belong to a group of people,
e.g., family, team, nation, race, church
*If you belong to the right group NOW(the winning side), no need to
worry about heaven: God will see you safely through . . .*
(Think of the impact of family on Michael Oher in “The Blind
Side”)

Key Salvation Question #2 in 1st Century Israel?

(= *the same as question #1, but phrased differently*)

i. *“Who is a child/descendant of Abraham?”*

To be a child of Abraham was to be a child of God

To be a descendant of Abraham was to belong to God’s people

4. Key Responses

i. Response of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-10)

“God can raise up children of Abraham even from these stones”

iv. Response of the Apostle Paul (Galatians 3:6-7)

Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’, so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham.

ii. Response of Jesus (John 8:39)

a. “They answered him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me’”

b. Calls ‘12’ disciples: this parallels the ‘12’ tribes of Israel and represents Jesus’ mission to establish a new “Chosen People”

iii. Response of Peter: (1 Peter 2:9)

“But you (the church) are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

4. Delicate Questions for the 21st century

- i. What about the physical descendants of Abraham today?
Still the chosen people?
Replaced by ‘those who believe in Jesus?’

ii. Response of Paul

Romans 9

-- My heart breaks: I don’t know why my people don’t believe in Jesus
-- God cannot forget his past work with them

Romans 10

-- I pray for them,

-- but at the moment, they’ve missed God’s plan in Christ

Romans 11

-- But God is still at work among them: not all . . . only a ‘remnant’
Loved because of their ‘physical’ heritage
YET counted as God’s people spiritually, ‘by grace’

iii. Response of Jesus -- Beware!! (Matthew 7:21ff)

a. There is a difference between humble confidence and arrogance
This is true for both Christians and Jews . . . and everyone else

b. The Faith of the Children of Abraham

= a humble, obedient confidence in the grace of God
which focuses on what God can have done for us (= ‘grace’)
not on what we have done for God

c. Some who seem to be outside the Christian faith

may have more faith in God’s grace
than those ‘inside’ . . . in which case, beware(!)

“the first may be last and the last may be first” (Mtt.20:16)

Matthew 3:1, 7-10

In those days **John the Baptist** appeared in the wilderness of Judea -- Proclaiming, 'repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near' . . . when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Matthew 7:21-28

Jesus: 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "*Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?*" Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers."
'Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.
The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.
And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.
The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a **chosen** race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The Apostle Paul's surprise and anguish that more of his fellow Jews were not putting their faith in Jesus, and his hope in God's grace . . .

Romans 9:1-5

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

Romans 10:1-4

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Romans 11:1-6 – but this rejection is not the last word . . .

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 'Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars; I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.' *But what is the divine reply to him?* 'I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.