

The Activity of God

10.5.25

Message 38

Romans 9:14–33 (CSB)

¹⁴ What should we say then? Is there injustice with God? Absolutely not! ¹⁵ For he tells Moses, **I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.** ¹⁶ So then, it does not depend on human will or effort but on God who shows mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture tells Pharaoh, **I raised you up for this reason so that I may display my power in you and that my name may be proclaimed in the whole earth.** ¹⁸ So then, he has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

¹⁹ You will say to me, therefore, “Why then does he still find fault? For who resists his will?” ²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Will what is formed say to the one who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?” ²¹ Or has the potter no right over the clay, to make from the same lump one piece of pottery for honor and another for dishonor? ²² And what if God, wanting to display his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much patience objects of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³ And what if he did this to make known the riches of his glory on objects of mercy that he prepared beforehand for glory—²⁴ on us, the ones he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As it also says in Hosea,

I will call Not my People, My People,

and she who is Unloved, Beloved.

²⁶ **And it will be in the place where they were told,**

you are not my people,

there they will be called sons of the living God.

²⁷ But Isaiah cries out concerning Israel,

Though the number of Israelites

is like the sand of the sea,

only the remnant will be saved;

²⁸ **since the Lord will execute his sentence**

completely and decisively on the earth.”

²⁹ And just as Isaiah predicted:

**If the Lord of Hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have become like Sodom,
and we would have been made like Gomorrah.**

ISRAEL'S PRESENT STATE

³⁰ What should we say then? Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained righteousness—namely the righteousness that comes from faith. ³¹ But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not achieved the righteousness of the law. ³² Why is that? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written,

**Look, I am putting a stone in Zion to stumble over
and a rock to trip over,
and the one who believes on him
will not be put to shame.**

Has God's Word Failed? Is God Unjust? Why did God make me like this?

A. These sound like modern questions.

1. Every person evaluates these questions at some level.
2. Is what God said actually true? And if so, show me.
3. Is God just?
 - a. Why do some people live great lives, and others don't?
 - b. Why does it seem that terrible people have it all, while good, moral people struggle?
4. Why did God make me like this?
 - a. This hits home for anyone who has had ongoing health struggles.
 - b. If you've ever asked that question, know you are in good company.

B. The Apostle isn't too sympathetic with these questions.

1. Instead, he points the reader to remember what they have read in Scripture.
2. God has his purposes, His plans, and all of it, somehow, points to His glory.
3. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

C. Most of us want to yell, "But How????"

1. How can God work together for the good of all who love Him and are called according to His purpose?
2. How can God possibly use me in this condition?
 - a. Wouldn't it be better if I wasn't like this?
 - b. Wouldn't it be better if I wasn't this way?
3. The Apostle stops the mind from spinning with a tricky question:
 - a. Does what is formed ask the one who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" Verse 20.
 - b. This is not a bad question:
 1. This question is right at home in Job, Psalms, or Ecclesiastes.
 2. Something about this particular time and place leads Paul to say, "Who are we to question God's plans and purposes."

D. There are times for debate and dialogue with God.

1. There are also times when our response is, "I trust you."
2. When we look at God and say, "I don't understand your plans, but I trust you."
3. That feels like part of the Apostle Paul's argument.
4. God's Word has not failed, so why are we questioning Him now?

Several conversations or statements in this passage.

A. Paul declared earlier that the Word of God has not failed.

1. Then he gives multiple examples throughout Romans 9.

2. Romans 9-11 has 24 Old Testament Questions.¹

3. He is illustrating and proving that God's Word has not failed, even though it might have felt like it.

a. God is just and fair.

b. God does use us, even when we feel like we are broken or unsuitable.

4. At this point, Romans 9 feels overwhelming.

a. I do this for a living, and I still find myself walking around while studying, muttering, "What does this mean?"

b. To help discover this, I have to slow down and ask, "What has God said in this passage?"

B. What has He said?

1. He told Abraham and Sarah, You will have children, a son of promise.

2. He told Rebekah: the older son will serve the younger.

3. Today's section contains several more statements that might be understood as a conversation:

a. The Apostle Paul is having a conversation with the believers in Rome.

b. And He's pulling these examples from the Old Testament to show the Gospel.

C. What I found helpful was to read these conversations and quotes as streams that are flowing into a river.

1. We have God's words and work through Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Pharaoh, Isaiah, and Hosea.

2. All of the streams have a God-ordained and directed purpose, and they merge into one BIG river.

3. What if the RIVER is the Gospel?

1. The Gospel is the message that God is active, He is in control, and has sent His Son to people who don't deserve him.

¹ NIVAC

- a. Jesus died at the hands of people who thought they were righteous and pursuing righteousness, the Jews, weren't.
 - b. They actually missed it.
 - c. Those who weren't pursuing righteousness, the Gentiles, were found by it through faith.
 - d. And this is all possible because of God's personal involvement in human history.
2. If God hadn't stepped in at Genesis 3 and made the first sacrifice to cover the sin and shame of Adam and Eve, then we would all be lost.
3. But the River, the Gospel, is God's plan in human history.
4. In that river is a Rock that must be navigated.
- a. Everyone must deal and confront that rock in their lifetime.
 - b. There are no exceptions.
5. The rock proved to be a stumbling stone for the Jews.
- a. They tripped over it and were destroyed by it because they refused to acknowledge its presence.
 - b. They thought it shameful and even sacrilegious that the Messiah would die a criminal's death.
 - c. But instead, they were put to shame.
6. But those who believed were not ashamed.
- a. They didn't stumble, because they weren't embarrassed.
 - b. They accepted Jesus, by faith, to be the Son of God and the King of the Universe.
 - c. Jesus is the rock.
 - d. A stumbling stone for the Jews, the rock of salvation for those who believe.

On Wednesday night, we will go into more detail and the complexity.

For us this morning, I want to point us to the big takeaways and truths we need to know or wrestle with.

What are a few takeaways from this passage?

1. God is active.

A. God is a God who speaks.

1. God told Moses his plans for good and victory for his people.
 - a. Moses was the leader of Israel because he was the perfect person for God's plan.
 - b. That by great miracles, God would redeem His people.
2. God told Pharaoh that Pharaoh was in the position of leadership for a similar reason: that God's glory would be shown to all the world.
 - a. The difference was that Moses' experience with God was positive.
 - b. Pharaoh's experience was negative.
3. We should not grow numb to this amazing reality:
 - a. God does speak.
 - b. Maybe not audibly, but that is possible.
 - c. He speaks through His Word, through the witness of the Spirit, through the Body of Believers, and through many creative ways.
 - d. What other religion has a God who does this?
4. One of the key components of our Church is that we do believe that God responds to His people.
 - a. We should avail ourselves to this!
 - b. Through prayer, worship, and study of Scripture, we need to position ourselves so that we can hear from God.

B. He is also a God who acts.

1. God could have sat back and let whatever happen, but He didn't.
2. He took initiative and inserted himself into the life of Abraham by choosing Him.

- a. Abraham didn't initiate the conversation, God did.
- b. Isaiah didn't seek to be Israel's prophet, God made it happen.
- c. God chose Moses long before the burning bush.
- d. God is acting in your life in ways you may not see or comprehend.

3. I love what Mary, the mother of Jesus, said as she caught a glimpse of what God was doing through her and around her.

Luke 1:46–55 (CSB)

MARY'S PRAISE

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ because he has looked with favor
on the humble condition of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations
will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ because the Mighty One
has done great things for me,
and his name is holy.
⁵⁰ His mercy is from generation to generation
on those who fear him.
⁵¹ He has done a mighty deed with his arm;
he has scattered the proud
because of the thoughts of their hearts;
⁵² he has toppled the mighty from their thrones
and exalted the lowly.
⁵³ He has satisfied the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering his mercy

⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he spoke to our ancestors.

C. When was the last time you stopped to glory in God's activity in your life?

1. Don't let the chaos of our days rob God of the glory He deserves.
2. Don't let the mess become our excuse for ignoring God's activity in our lives.
3. Even though we can't see all of God's plans, we declare that God is active in our world.

2. Hardening of the heart can be fatal.

A. Paul mentions Pharaoh as an example of someone that God used for His purposes and plans.

1. If you may remember, Pharaoh repeatedly refused to listen to Moses and he and his people paid a terrible price.
2. But, did God force Pharaoh?
3. The answer is no, God did not make Pharaoh do something he didn't want to do.

B. Pharaoh's heart was hardened.

1. The word "harden" (Gk. *skleryno*) refers to being in a state of insensitivity to God, his Word, and his work.²

a. God knew the heart and personality of this particular man and knew that he would not willingly repent, listen, or obey.

b. God knew that Pharaoh would resist the Word of God.

2. Therefore, in Pharaoh, God found someone perfectly suitable to accomplish His plans of humbling Egypt and releasing Israel from captivity.

² Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 311.

B. We are all in danger of hardening our hearts to God.

1. Pharaoh is a cautionary tale.

a. Even though the Jewish people are God's chosen people, hardness of heart separated them from God.

b. Our response to Jesus is everything.

2. Judas Iscariot would be another example of someone who hardened their hearts.

a. Judas saw all the miracles.

b. Judas lived with Jesus for 3 years.

c. Judas did not like where Jesus was going, so he willingly betrayed the Son of God.

d. Jesus knew this ahead of time, but He did not determine it or force him to do it.

e. Judas hardened his heart and resisted for so long that there came a point when Luke 22:3 says, "Satan entered Judas."

C. The most dangerous thing we can do is to repeatedly reject the Holy Spirit.

1. Rarely do people crash in a day or moment.

2. When we see people walk away from God, or their families, or commit some crime, this was a long time coming.

3. We are all in danger of hardening our hearts to God and His voice.

4. What can we do to soften our hearts?

D. If you find yourself being hardened:

1. Schedule more time to read your Bible and pray.

2. Evaluate your worship.

3. Fast.

a. In the natural, Fasting is a powerful discipline because it makes us more sensitive to insulin.

b. In the spiritual, fasting makes us more sensitive to God.

4. Change your pace and perspective.

- a. Even the best things can become routine.
- b. Change your routine, buy a new Bible, find a different spot to pray, do something.

E. Hardening our hearts to God is a possibility, but it doesn't have to happen.

- 1. If you feel as if you aren't where you should be or want to be, that's good news.
- 2. It means you aren't too far gone.
- 3. The Holy Spirit wants to help draw you closer to Jesus.

3. What we do with Jesus is what matters most.

A. The only evaluation of life that matters is what we did with Jesus.

- 1. We all must be evaluated by this Rock.
- 2. Did we stumble over Him, unsure of what to make of this Jesus of Nazareth?
- 3. Did we reject Him because we couldn't or wouldn't understand?
- 4. Did we recognize Him as the Son of God and ruler over everything, including my life?

B. All of us are in different stages of life.

- 1. Some of us are in survival mode.
 - a. We are hoping to just make it till the kids grow up, we retire, or our next paycheck comes in.
 - b. When we are in survival mode, one of the areas of life that often suffers is the spiritual one.
 - c. We are so busy just trying to keep things going, we don't put our spiritual oxygen masks on.
 - d. So we run on fumes.
 - e. What happens if you run your car out of gas?
 - 1. Not only does it stop, but it can also cause problems with fuel pumps, sensors, and other vital elements.
 - 2. When we are running on spiritual fumes, with no plans to fill up, we will harden our hearts and stop altogether.

2. Some of us are in gathering mode.

- a. We finally have enough money to upgrade the beater car to something more dependable, like a Ford.
- b. Or we are deep into middle-aged hobbies like lawn care and smoking meat.
- c. Or we are trying to pay off houses and invest for retirement.
- d. All of this is good.
 - 1. But if it costs us our relationship with Jesus, it is bad.
 - 2. While we are enjoying our days and preparing for the future, don't forget that my eternity is not judged by what I owned, but by my faith in Jesus Christ.
 - 3. Don't sacrifice your eternity for your future.

3. Some of us are in downsizing mode.

- a. You're retired, your interests and energy has changed, and you find yourself more interested in getting rid of stuff than buying it.
- b. This can be a great stage of life.
- c. However, one danger that we are seeing is that in the process of downsizing, many Gen X and Boomer Christians are not attending church.³
 - 1. Over the past few years, Millennials and Gen Z have been leading in church attendance.
 - 2. While those at our around retirement age are the least likely to attend church regularly.
- d. Dear saint of God, please don't downsize your church involvement!
 - 1. Please don't step back, step down, or step away!
 - 2. Not only does the church need you.
 - 3. But you need Jesus as much now as ever before.
- e. And the greatest thing you can do for those around you is to be as in love with Jesus at your deathbed as you were when you were first saved.

³ <https://www.churchtrac.com/articles/the-state-of-church-attendance-trends-and-statistics-2023>

4. Faith is the key.

A. Faith is what pleases God.

1. Faith makes us family.
2. Faith grants us a place with God now and in eternity.
3. Faith keeps us focused on Jesus when times are hard, when times are good, and everything in between.
4. Faith is what navigates the River and keeps us from shipwrecking our lives.

B. Faith is the appropriate response to who God is and what he has done.

1. Faith sometimes looks like obedience.
2. Faith looks like trust.
3. Faith looks like dependence.
4. Ultimately, faith looks like love.

C. The Jews, like many of us, have pursued righteousness in all the wrong ways.

1. We thought we had to earn God's love, deserve God's love, and encourage God to love us.
2. What the Jews couldn't grasp was that the way to God's heart is to love Him in return.
 - a. When we love God, our faith will look like obedience, trust, and dependence.
 - b. When we love God, we will put away the sin that so easily entangles us.
 - c. We will avoid the places that encourage sin, we will stop watching those shows, we will do a lot of things.
 - d. Not to earn our salvation, but to participate in it.
3. Romans 9:16 reminds us that we are not saved by human effort but on God...
 - a. This is the Gospel, and I don't understand it.
 - b. This is the Gospel, and I'm thankful.

Response:

A. Let me lead us in a time of prayer that is specific to our church.

1. I've been reflecting a lot on our church and these services.
2. This is an amazing church with some of my favorite people in the world.
3. One thing we do REALLY well is the second commandment: Love others.
4. But I feel that we have grown a bit stale in the first commandment: Love God with all of our heart, mind, and soul.

B. I want to lean into this component.

1. For the next few moments, I want to ask you to join me in a time of prayer.
2. Lord, I don't want to ever be insensitive or hardened toward you.
3. I don't want to put works above faith.
4. I do want to grow closer.

C. This morning, I want to invite all who will to join me in a time of prayer:

1. God, help me to love you with all aspects of my being.
2. God, draw me closer to you than ever before.