

Gospel Glory goes to God

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[0 : 0 0] Well, thank you for your welcome. It's a great delight to be with you tonight. I'm very pleased you're working your way through Romans. When I retire, I'm thinking of writing a series of commentaries on books of the Bible.

I thought Roaming Through Romans might be a good title. Galloping Through Galatians, perhaps? Dithering Through Deuteronomy? Sorry, Paul.

Journing Through Job? Raving Through Revelation, I guess, would make sense, wouldn't it? But I know you've been roaming through Romans, and Megan has explained chapters 10 and 11, so I'll just say QED.

I mean, chapter 11 just says, that's right. Well, it's great to be with you, and thank you very much. Well, if you have, there's a sermon out there, I think, floating around, and if you have your Bibles open to page 921, that would be a great help.

I wonder if you've seen the book Operation World. What Operation World does is to give you the statistics about Christian faith presence in all the nations of the world.

[1 : 1 9] And one year, I was feeling especially strong and decided that I'd work through Operation World and pray for a nation a day. Well, I didn't last very long because the A's aren't very encouraging.

Albania, Algeria, Australia. America was a bit more encouraging, but the first three, why are they basket cases?

So if you flip through Operation World, you'll find that in many countries of the world, Christians might number, say, 1.5% or 2%. And then of those, a half will be nominal Christians.

So you think, well, that's not a lot of people left, is it, who are believers in Jesus Christ. It's great to get together with our Christian brothers and sisters and sing about God's glory and God's great gospel plan.

And great to read in Romans chapter 1 that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. But if the gospel is so powerful, why don't we see its power more evident in our world today?

[2 : 2 6] We see believers because we come to church. But there are many, many, many millions of people who never have heard of a church, let alone go to a church, let alone believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, let alone give glory to God.

I was so paralyzed by this distress that I ended up not praying at all, which is not a very good result of using Operation World. So I went to see a friend of mine, Graham Cole, who was then principal of Ridley College, and asked him for some help.

He was very helpful. He pointed out that God already had appointed his Messiah and I didn't do the job. And that what I should do is trust the work of Jesus Christ. Quite right.

But I am comforted that Paul faces the same stress and the same dilemma in Romans. For if in chapter 1 Paul says that the gospel is the power of God for salvation for all who believe, to the Jew first, then to the Greek, he also says, as you've already seen in chapter 9, I have a great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

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. So Paul has within his mind both this great confidence in the gospel power of God, but in his heart a deep anguish about his own people who are unbelievers.

[3 : 51] So if Paul had that great confidence and that great anguish together, it must be all right for us to have the same confidence and the same anguish.

It must be good for us to have the same confidence and the same gospel anguish. And it must be impossible for us, I think, to read our newspaper or look out on the countless billions of our world without sharing gospel anguish, but also, I hope, retaining confidence in God's gospel plan.

What I've just painted in macrocosm, of course, is also experienced by many of us in microcosm, isn't it? I was the first person converted in my family.

Most of my family are still not believers. I believe in the power of the gospel, but I haven't seen it very evident in my family yet.

But Paul not only has confidence in God's gospel plan, he also believes that this gospel plan will bring glory to God, that gospel glory does indeed go to God.

[5 : 05] That's how he ends the chapter. To him be the glory forever. Amen. And I hope you have an interest in God's glory.

Gospel glory goes to God sounds a bit remote, doesn't it? It's not a title for a sermon which meets our need or promises to give us some practical direction.

No, Paul's working on a different sphere. He's talking about the fact that God's gospel plan will finally bring glory to God. But we are often not concerned about God's glory.

We're more concerned about our own comfort. And that's the way my prayers naturally fall towards things that concern me. And I have to remind myself to pray, not only for people in need, but also for God's glory, for God's greater glory.

For we're naturally curved in on ourselves. We naturally are concerned about ourselves, our own lives, our own person, perhaps our families and our friends. And it takes a lot of the work of grace within us to open us out to the world and open us out to God and God's glory.

[6 : 18] And I might also say one of the sad things about successful evangelism is that it often leads to glory going to the evangelist or to the church and not to God.

Gospel glory goes to God. And so we can have confidence in God's gospel plan.

Well, let me give you an outline of Romans chapter 11. The question that begins in with which Paul begins in verse one is the key to the chapter. I ask then, has God rejected his people?

And Paul answers that immediately by no means. How does he answer it? Well, verses 11 and 12 give the heart of the answer.

Have they, that is, God's people stumble so as to fall by no means. But through their stumbling, salvation has come to the Gentiles so as to make Israel jealous. Now, if their stumbling means riches for the world and their defeat means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean?

[7 : 28] So verses one and verses 11 and 12 give the question of the chapter and the answer. And the rest of the chapter merely expands the question and expands the answer.

So let's go back to verse one. I ask then, has God rejected his people by no means? And what evidence does Paul give for that? Well, there is a remnant.

There are Jews who are true believers in God. Paul, first of all, gives himself as an example. I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

So Paul himself is a sign of God's gospel power at work among the descendants of Abraham, the Israelites. Paul himself was converted from Judaism to Jesus Christ.

But there are other examples, and Paul points to one in the Old Testament. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah? How he pleads with God against Israel. Well, Lord, they've killed your prophets, they've demolished your altars.

[8 : 35] I alone am left, and they are seeking my life. And I must say, I've heard lots of believers pray that way. The Elijah syndrome is still alive and well and living in Melbourne.

What's God's reply to him? The divine reply, verse four. I've kept for myself 7,000 who've not bowed the knee to Baal. So has God rejected his people?

No, he's accepted Paul, and he accepted Elijah and the 7,000. So verse five explains the consequence. So at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace.

If it is by grace, it's no longer on the basis of works. Otherwise, grace would be no longer grace. Grace here, of course, means God's free gift, God's decision to work in his kindness, not on the basis of people's goodness, but on the basis of his love and compassion.

Well, has God rejected his people? Overall, no. There are some believers. But then in general, verses 7, 8, 9, and 10, Israel has failed to obtain what it was seeking.

[9 : 56] There are some elect and others who are hardened. The elect obtain it, those who are chosen by God, verse 7, but the rest were hardened. And then Paul gives evidence from the Old Testament.

As it's written, God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day. And David says, let the table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them.

Let their eyes be darkened so they cannot see. Let them keep their backs forever bent. So God lets people have what they choose.

God has mercy on people, but does not force them to respond. And God hardens them, that is, leaves them in their unbelief and rebellion against God.

But verse 11 points out how God is using their stumbling. Have they stumbled so as to fall? That is, have they stumbled in faith so as to fall away entirely?

[10 : 56] By no means. But through their stumbling, salvation has come to the Gentiles so as to make Israel jealous. If their stumbling means riches for the world, if their defeat means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean?

And by way of an apology for my comments about Deuteronomy earlier on, we're now turning to Deuteronomy, be pleased to know, chapter 32, if you could turn to that. Chapter 32 of Deuteronomy.

Someone tell me the page number so I can tell everybody else. 165. 165, thank you. Deuteronomy 32 is the Song of Moses, and it is, if you like, a summary of the Old Testament, or indeed a summary of the whole Bible.

It begins with praise to God. The rock, verse 4, the rock, his work is perfect. All his ways are just. A faithful God without deceit. Just and upright is he.

And yet the great dilemma throughout the scriptures is that his degenerate children have dealt falsely with him, a perverse and crooked generation. Pick it up at verse 10. We find that God sustained Israel in a desert land, in a howling wilderness waste, shielded him, cared for him, guided him as the apple of his eye.

[12 : 25] As an eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, as it spreads its wings, takes them up and bears them aloft on its pinions, so God alone, the Lord alone guided him. No foreign God was with him.

And it goes on to talk about the way in which God has cared for his people. Yet we pick it up at verse 15. Jacob ate his fill. Jeshurun grew fat and kicked. You grew fat, bloated and gorged.

He abandoned God who made him, scoffed at the rock of his salvation, made him jealous with strange gods, with abhorrent things. They provoked him. They sacrificed to demons and not God.

So they made God jealous. There it is in verse 16. Verse 19, the Lord saw it and was jealous.

He spurned his sons and daughters. He said, I'll hide my face from them and bring disasters on them. And yet there's something else to come.

[13 : 21] In verse 32, their vine comes from the... Sorry. Sorry, back to verse 21, if you would.

Sorry, I got the wrong verse. Verse 21, when God says, and here's the crucial verse for Romans 11, they made me jealous with what is no God, provoked me with their idols. So I'll make them jealous with what is no people and provoke them with a foolish nation.

So God says, well, they made me jealous because I wanted to know them and for them to serve me. They made me jealous with something that isn't a God, that is, with idols. They provoked me with their idols. So I'll make them jealous with what is no people.

That is, I'll bring my faith to the nations, to Gentiles, and Israel will become jealous and say, whoa, hang on a moment. That's our blessing those nations are getting. And so God's plan, carefully explained in Deuteronomy 32, verse 21, Paul reminds the Romans of in Romans chapter 11.

Through their stumbling, salvation has come to the Gentiles so as to make Israel jealous. And as I said, verses 11 and 12 are the answer, the key to the chapter.

[14 : 39] Now, if their stumbling means riches for the world, their defeat means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean? And then Paul addresses the Gentiles to whom he's writing, that is, the members of the church in Rome who weren't Jews, but came from other nations.

I'm speaking to you Gentiles, he says. Inasmuch as I'm apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry to make my own people jealous, and that saves some of them.

So Paul promotes his Gentile evangelism, hoping that the Jews will look across and say, wow, look at that. How are those people getting our blessings?

How are they becoming children of Abraham? How are they receiving all God's promises? They're our promises. We want them too. And so Paul's gospel aim is to promote the Gentile mission, to make the Jews jealous, so they too will return to God.

For verse 15, if their rejection, that is, the rejection of Israel, is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy.

[15 : 52] If the root is holy, then the branch is also a holy. And then Paul develops that image in verses 17 following of Israel as an olive tree.

Some of the branches are broken off, and the Gentiles are wild olive shoots grafted into the olive tree. I'm not an expert in horticulture. I think this is the right thing to do, but perhaps Paul was better at making tents than growing olive trees.

But his point is, if you're a wild olive shoot grafted in their place, verse 18, don't boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it's not you that support the root, but the root that supports you.

You'll say, branches are broken off that I might be grafted in. That is true. They are broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe.

For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God. Severity towards those who've fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness, otherwise you also will be cut off.

[17:11] And then even those of Israel, if they don't persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you've been cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will those natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree?

So, Paul's plan, address the Gentiles, is that he glorifies his ministry to make the Jews jealous.

He tells them they've been grafted in. The Jews' branches have been broken off, but branches may be grafted back in again. His hope is the Gentiles may come in and that all Israel may be saved, verse 25 to 29.

So do not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters. I want you to understand this mystery. A hardening has come upon a part of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and so all Israel will be saved.

As it's written, out of Zion will come the deliver. He'll banish ungodliness from Jacob. This is my covenant with them when I take away their sins. The full number of the Gentiles, verse 25, and all Israel, verse 26, is talking about the great number of Gentiles and of Israel whom God plans to save.

[18:38] He's not talking about individual people. He's saying there'll be heaps and heaps of Gentiles and lots and lots of Israel will be saved by God's gospel plan. So, and the Gentiles are experiencing this, verse 28, as regards the gospel, they're enemies of God for your sake.

As regards election, they're beloved for the sake of their ancestors. For gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. And then this wonderful putting together of disobedience and mercy.

Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so that they've now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they too may now receive mercy.

For God has imprisoned all in disobedience that he may be merciful to all. Well, I wonder how you respond to this description of God's gospel plan for Jews and Gentiles.

Perhaps you didn't ever begin worrying about it. Perhaps the question of 11, chapter 11, verse 1, has never crossed your mind. Has God rejected his people? But I hope it has crossed your mind.

[19:50] I hope you're concerned about gospel progress in the world. And if you are concerned about the progress of the gospel in the world among Jews and Gentiles, then Romans 11, 1 should have crossed your mind.

Indeed, it should be a matter of great concern for you. And as the progress of the gospel among the Jews should be a matter of great concern, so God's gospel progress among the Gentiles should be a matter of great concern for you as well.

And if you believe that the gospel is the power of God for salvation, then I hope you share with Paul a great sorrow and unceasing anguish in your heart for your family, for your friends, for your nation, for all people.

only sinners can receive mercy. If we remove the justice of God, of course, we remove God's mercy as well.

Yes, only those who are sinners can receive mercy, only those who know they've failed God can receive God's free gift, God's grace, God's mercy, God's compassion, God's kindness.

[21 : 16] And some Christians today think that they want to cross out the idea of God being a judge, thinking that will make God more loving. In fact, it makes God less loving because if God is not a judge, then he might as well accept everybody.

But if God is a God of justice, a God of judgment, and he is merciful, how great is that mercy? Thank you. Well, I hope you've enjoyed Romans 9-11.

I think the most remarkable thing about these chapters is that Paul puts election and hardening so clearly on the agenda in chapter 9.

Yet, by chapter 10, has a great call for the preaching of the gospel. So, election doesn't cross out the preaching of the gospel.

And in chapter 11, the application to the Gentiles Gentiles is not God's chosen you, be arrogant, but note the kindness and severity of God.

[22 : 29] Verse 22. Or, verse 8, 20 and 25, do not boast, do not become proud, do not claim wisdom. Or, verse 20, stand through faith in awe of God.

Or, verse 22, continue in his kindness. For we find it very hard to cope with the idea that God has chosen us before the foundation of the world.

And our great temptation, the first question in our minds is, well, perhaps we can just sit back and enjoy ourselves. Or, perhaps we're really rather special because God has chosen us. But notice how carefully Paul puts before the Gentiles the right response to being elected, to being chosen by God.

Do not become proud, he says, verse 20, but stand in awe. Don't despise the branches broken off, just because you, so you could be broken in, you could be grafted in.

Note, verse 22, the kindness and severity of God. Severity towards those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Keep yourself in God's grace, otherwise you too will be cut off.

[23 : 37] God's grace, so Paul wants Jews and Gentiles alike to marvel at the grace and glory of God.

For at the end, when we see people from every tribe, language, nation and people gathered around the throne to worship God and worship the Lamb, we won't be thinking to ourselves, we made that happen.

We'll be saying, God did it all. No wonder then that Paul ends this chapter with an ascription of praise to God, wondering at the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are his judgments, verse 33, and how inscrutable his ways. Then quotations in the Old Testament, who's the known the mind of the Lord or who's been his counsel, that is, who could have guessed God's gospel plan, clearly revealed in Deuteronomy and now explained even more clearly in Romans.

Or verse 35, who's given a gift to him to receive a gift in return, who's paid God for salvation? No one. For from him and through him and to him are all things, to him be the glory forever.

[25 : 06] God's grace alone leads to our salvation. So our salvation shows God's glory alone.

how easily we distort the gracious gospel of God's grace and glory.

How easily we hug God's grace to ourselves and ignore those who are without faith. How easily we boast about gospel progress, gospel success when it happens.

And how easily we neglect our call to suffer anguish for those who are not yet believers in Jesus Christ. How quickly and easily we become self-centered in our prayers, in our singing.

And how slow we are to give glory to God. O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

[26 : 29] For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

be the gift even for the Welt, to him and the will wait to him and to you and the will be the host of that.

Hold up for the God's confirmed and over to him. Thank you.