

## HOW GREAT IS GOD'S MERCY

You may recall that last time we concluded our study with Paul's announcement that the Jewish nation of Israel will be saved before the return of Christ. Just exactly when that will be we can't say, but there are certainly enough indications in the Scripture that would lead us to believe it will very likely happen some time during the Great Tribulation, perhaps only months or even weeks before the return of Christ and the establishment of His millennial kingdom on the earth.

We also spoke of a great mystery that God revealed through the writings of the apostle Paul. Do you remember what the mystery was? A mystery that was made clear in Ephesians 3:4-7.

The "*mystery*" was that God always intended salvation to come to the Gentiles. His plan was for it to come through the Jews. He gave the Jews the Scriptures and Christ. They COULD HAVE BEEN the messengers who carried the Word of God to all the nations, most often referred to as the Gentiles. Had the Jews fulfilled their assigned mission, both Jews and Gentiles would have received salvation.

Then in Romans 11:25,26, Paul writes:

*25 I want you to understand this mystery, dear brothers and sisters, so that you will not feel proud and start bragging. Some of the Jews have hard hearts, but this will last only until the complete number of Gentiles comes to Christ.*

*26 And so ALL ISRAEL WILL BE SAVED. Do you remember what the prophets said about this? "A Deliverer will come from Jerusalem, and he will turn Israel from all ungodliness.*

Now we'll pick up from there this morning in verse 27. In fact let's get an overview of the rest of Romans chapter 11 and read verses 27-36:

*27 And then I will keep my covenant with them and take away their sins."*

*28 Many of the Jews are now enemies of the Good News. But this has been to your (the Gentiles)<sup>1</sup> benefit, for God has given his gifts to you Gentiles.*

*Yet the Jews are still his chosen people because of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*

*29 For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn.*

*30 Once, you Gentiles were rebels against God, but when the Jews refused his mercy, God was merciful to you instead.*

*31 And now, in the same way, the Jews are the rebels, and God's mercy*

---

<sup>1</sup> Parentheses added.

*has come to you. But someday they, too, will share in God's mercy.*

*32 FOR GOD HAS IMPRISONED ALL PEOPLE IN THEIR OWN DISOBEDIENCE SO HE COULD HAVE MERCY ON EVERYONE.*

*33 Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are his riches and wisdom and knowledge! **HOW IMPOSSIBLE IT IS FOR US TO UNDERSTAND HIS DECISIONS AND HIS METHODS!***

*34 For who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who knows enough to be his counselor?*

*35 And who could ever give him so much that he would have to pay it back?*

*36 For everything comes from him; everything exists by his power and is intended for his glory. To him be glory evermore. Amen.*

Let's begin with verse 27: "then I will keep **my covenant** with them and take away their sins." This was the promise of God given to Jeremiah in the Old Testament some six hundred years before the birth of Christ, where God speaks of the **new covenant**. Jeremiah writes in Jeremiah 31:31-33:

*31 "The day will come," says the Lord, "when I will make a **NEW COVENANT** with the people of Israel and Judah.*

*32 This **covenant** (promise)<sup>2</sup> will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. **They broke that covenant, THOUGH I LOVED THEM AS A HUSBAND LOVES HIS WIFE,**" says the Lord.*

*33 "But this is the **new covenant** I will make with the people of Israel on that day," says the Lord. "**I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them ON THEIR HEARTS. I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY WILL BE MY PEOPLE.***

God's saying that He is going to make a **new covenant** with Israel that isn't going to be like the last one which they broke. He's going to make a covenant with the "*people of Israel*," not a remnant, not just a small number of the people of Israel, but with the nation of Israel. Then Paul goes on to be even more specific in Jeremiah 31:34 (NRSV):

*34 No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for **they shall all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.*

This is the **new covenant** made for Israel. God repeats this promise in Jeremiah 32:38-40. The difference between the old covenant and the new covenant is that the old covenant was on the outside and new covenant is where? It's on the inside. God says He will put it on their hearts, He will bring the nation of Israel to faith in Jesus Christ.

The purpose of all of this is to put God's sovereignty and glory on display. You see God

---

<sup>2</sup> Parentheses added.

controls history and that in itself is evidence enough of His sovereignty. He controls human history totally. Human history is constantly moving on a track that God has established and no one and nothing is going to alter it even the least bit. Do you think it's by coincidence that in 1948, after nineteen hundred years of being scattered all over the world, Jews again came back to where their history began, and then established the nation of Israel, while all of their neighbors from centuries before had passed from the realm of human history? God brought them back because He controls history to work out His sovereign will with infinite power.

Now Paul doesn't want us only to see God's sovereignty in these verses. He also wants us to see God's integrity. In ultimately saving Israel, God reveals Himself to be a God who keeps His promises. Romans 11:26 in the more accurate NAS translation says: "*All Israel will be saved; just as it is written.*" If it's written in the Bible, that's the way it will be because God controls history and if He tells us something will happen in the Bible, it will happen. Paul loves to go back to the Old Testament for support. In verse 26, the statement "*The deliverer will come from Zion,*" comes from Isaiah 59:20,21 (NRSV):

*20 And he will come to Zion (promised land) <sup>3</sup>as **Redeemer**, to those in **Jacob** who turn from transgression, says the Lord.*

*21 And as for me, this is **my covenant** with them, says the Lord: my spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children, says the Lord, from now on and forever.*

"*Jacob*" is just another name for Israel. The promise here is that God is going to save Israel. Israel's salvation is an absolute certainty because God promised it. And because He keeps His promises He is a God to be glorified. Before going on, you may find it helpful to get some feel for God's integrity when making a covenant promise. When God makes a promise He does so with the intent of it being a promise forever and one day being fulfilled. In Genesis 15:5-21, God made a promise to Abraham. The father of the nation of Israel through whose descendants all future promises were to be made and kept. Here is what God said: Genesis 15:5-21 (NRSV):

*5 He (God)<sup>4</sup> brought him (Abraham)<sup>5</sup> outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "**So shall your descendants be.**"*

*6 And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as **righteousness.***

This is where Abraham received his gift of salvation. God granted him salvation because he believed and trusted everything the Lord told Him.

---

<sup>3</sup> Parentheses added.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

*7 Then he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess."  
8 But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"  
9 He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."  
10 He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.  
11 And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.  
12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.  
13 Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years;  
14 but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.*

This is exactly what happened to Abraham's descendants during the captivity in Egypt. And Moses brought them out of that captivity and led them to the Promised Land.

*15 As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.  
16 And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."  
17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.  
18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,  
19 the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,  
20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,  
21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."*

Here God makes a covenant promise with Abraham. He tells Abraham to go and get three animals and two birds, kill them and cut them in half and lay them on the ground. Half of some on this side and the other half over on this side. God then gave Abraham a divine anesthetic and knocked him out. Abraham went into a deep sleep and God Himself like a smoking lamp and a burning furnace passed between those pieces. This is how contracts in these times were sealed. Normally both parties to the agreement would walk between the halves of the animals, affirming that the same thing, being cut in half, should happen to them if they break the contract or promise.

When God made His promise or contract with Abraham, He didn't let Abraham go between the pieces. God put him to sleep and went through alone because God was making a covenant promise, not dependent on Abraham, but on God's own unchangeable nature. And five hundred years later God fulfilled that promise by leading Abraham's

descendants out of bondage in Egypt and to the promised land of Israel.

And when God set out to redeem Israel it was to fulfill the covenant that He made with Himself. When God makes a covenant promise with God, nobody is going to break it. The redemption of Israel is based on an unconditional covenant promise that God would bless the descendants of Abraham. That Abrahamic covenant eventually passed into the new covenant which is also unconditional. The next two verses reinforce this. Romans 11:28,29:

*28 Many of the Jews are now **enemies** of the Good News. But this has been to your benefit, for God has given his gifts to you Gentiles. Yet **the Jews are still his chosen people because of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.***

*29 For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn.*

The Jews are presently enemies of the message of the Gospel, the Good News preached by Jesus. But they are still the chosen people of God. They are the beloved of God. At one and the same time they are enemies of God and the beloved of God. Concerning the Gospel the Jews are the enemies of God. As being the chosen of God they are loved.

We have a God who has absolute integrity. We can give glory to a God who has absolute integrity. He's not like the people He's created. Are you weary of the fact that people make promises they never keep? Men and women make promises and contracts and then break them all the time. Just look at the divorce rate or how overburdened our judicial system is. God has integrity. Bless His name for that.

Now let's move on to Romans 11:30,31:

*30 Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience,*

*31 so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy.*

Do you know why Jehovah God, the one and only God of the Bible, stands out head and shoulders above the gods of other religions?

Because He has mercy on the disobedient.

No other gods of any other religion do that. If you don't believe that, go check it out. Gather up all your research materials and then come back and Betty and I will spend all the time you'd like in a friendly debate that you'll end up losing.

No matter how disobedient a person is, if they come to God and accept His Son, Jesus Christ, as their personal Savior, repent of their sins, and ask Jesus to take control of their

lives and mean it, God will forgive them and give them eternal life in Heaven. It doesn't matter if you're a mass murderer, a child abuser, or a Hitler style tyrant. God will forgive if a person undergoes a true conversion experience.

Perhaps you're thinking to yourself, "*What kind of God would forgive Hitler? Look at all of the horrible things he did.*" You're right, it would be awfully hard to accept that God would forgive someone like Hitler. And the chances are very slim that Hitler ever repented and invited Christ into His life. But if he had, he would have received salvation. His crimes against humanity were appalling. But **isn't it comforting to know** that no matter what you've done, you can still be forgiven? Don't trouble yourself worrying about the insanely evil people in the world, God will judge them as they deserve. Rather concern yourself with your eternity and those whose lives you touch. People just don't comprehend the reality of eternity anymore. Especially in the culture of the twenty-first century.

We must remember that there is nothing within any of us that commends us to God and it is only because of His grace and mercy that any of us are saved. I don't think I would be exaggerating if I were to estimate that less than one percent of the people in the United States have any idea of what salvation and eternal life is all about. Polls tell us that perhaps as many as eighty percent of the people in the United States believe in God and consider themselves to be Christians. Yet if you ask them what it means to be a Christian, all they can tell you is what they think, and what they think isn't based on a single shred of real evidence other than what they or their friends think.

If you were God, would you put people on the earth and expect them to do what is right just by letting them do whatever they think to be right? Or would you in some way communicate to them certain standards for doing the right thing? Without some standard to go by, we would have a culture in which everybody would do what they think is right. Sound familiar? So if God, the Creator of the world and all living things required that people crawl on their hands and knees over a quarter mile bed of glass every day in order to be saved, and never made that known to anyone, it would be up to each individual to think that requirement up on their own if they were to be saved. What do you think the chances would be of their doing that? Little or none would probably be a pretty accurate guess.

If you were to go out on the street this morning and sample a hundred people, asking them where they're going after they die and how it is that they know that, I'll bet you would get a hundred different answers. Why? Because they have never checked out what God's standards for salvation are. They don't know what God says in the Bible about being saved and going to Heaven. All they can do is think something up in their minds that they can be comfortable with. After all, no one in their right mind would want to spend eternity in the torment of Hell, right? So they say something like, "*Oh, I'll probably go to Heaven because God wouldn't really send a decent person like me to Hell.*" Or perhaps they'll say, "*I've served my church as a member of the choir for twenty years and sung a lot of praises to God. That should be enough to get me in.*" I would tell you some of the really bizarre, unbelievable responses to that question that

I've actually heard but no one would believe I was telling the truth.

Friends, God gave us His standards for salvation. He opened up His mind and who He is to us all through the Bible. And for those of you that don't think, you'll observe I used that word, "*think*", again, that the Bible isn't the Word of God and without error, well you come up after the service and tell us all the reasons you think that way and we'll do our best to show you the irrefutable evidence. One of the realities that people don't like about the Bible is that it states clearly that those who die without being saved will spend their eternity in Hell. Well it won't matter what they think after they die because they'll stand before God on their own and He'll tell them the reality concerning their eternity and frankly that He could care less **what they think**. And at that point there will be no opportunity for appealing the verdict. You can only do that while you're alive.

Do you think many people give a second thought to spending their forever in Hell, suffering every moment? Of course they don't because they don't know the standard that God has set before each person for salvation. They just kind of hope God wouldn't do something like that to them, when all they would have to do to be sure, would be to look in the Bible. They don't know the standard because they don't read the Bible, they don't go to a church that teaches the truth, and they don't hang around with people who do those things. I went to many of the churches in Wheaton to do some research before we started Village Church and I didn't hear the pure truth of the gospel message preached at any of them. I heard beautiful music, interesting and entertaining sermons, fascinating dramatic sketches, but I didn't hear anybody telling people how they could be saved and go to Heaven for eternity. We need a revival in this country and we need preachers who know the truth, believe it, and aren't afraid to preach it.

And even though millions upon millions of Americans have been stumbling around in the dark for so long, they could be saved, because we have a merciful God who will forgive them as soon as they turn to the truth and embrace it. And the sum of all this comes in verse 32, Romans 11:32:

32 For God has **imprisoned** all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

This verse deals with a question that I've heard asked over and over again. In fact everyone at one time or another may have asked it. The question is, Why did God allow sin to occur? If He's so all powerful and in control of everything why didn't He just allow the world to be perfect? Do you know why God allowed sin? He allowed sin because one of the attributes of God's nature is **mercy**. Because God is a God of mercy, God has His reasons for revealing and exercising that mercy, and the only way that such mercy can be exercised is where there is sin. So in order for God to reveal Himself as a merciful God, God has allowed sin so that He might show mercy toward the sinner. Do you remember Romans 3:9, where Paul wrote:

*9 Well then, are we Jews better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown that **all people**, whether Jews or Gentiles, **are under the***

***power of sin.****10 As the Scriptures say, “No one is good— not even one.**11 No one has real understanding; no one is seeking God.**12 All have turned away from God; all have gone wrong. No one does good, **not even one.**”*

These verses characterize the whole world; all men and women from the beginning of time to the end. Why has God allowed this? Look at Romans 3:19,20 (NRSV):

*19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and **the whole world may be held accountable to God.***

*20 For “no human being will be justified in his sight” by deeds prescribed by the law, for **through the law comes the knowledge of sin.***

Why does God want the whole world accountable to Him? Why does God want the whole world to be convicted of sin? So that all people may be seen to be unworthy. **Then wherever God moves in with salvation, He is demonstrating the attribute of mercy.** You might be saying to yourself, “*But not all people receive mercy.*” And that’s true because God also needs to demonstrate His wrath. The reason there is a Hell is so that God may demonstrate His wrath and be glorified.

When you see the wrath that is in store for you without the mercy of God, you are hard pressed not to glorify Him for the mercy He offers so that you need not suffer that wrath.

If you’re having trouble with that concept, think about this. If you didn’t believe you would be punished for your disobedience, you wouldn’t worry too much about being disobedient, would you? That’s the attitude that’s taking over our culture today. People refuse to recognize there are consequences for their behavior and so they do just about anything they want to without worry. They have chosen to close their eyes to the truth and they are greasing their own slope to an eternity in Hell. The day they die, terror and regret will fill every part of their existence. Unfortunately it will be too late then. On the other hand, if you know that there is punishment for your disobedience and someone shows you a way to avoid that punishment while enjoying the best life possible, you would be a fool if you turned it down, right? In fact, you’d be very grateful to the one who provided that opportunity for you, wouldn’t you? That’s the way God is. He wants you to know that He loves you so much that He will keep you from the punishment if you trust and obey.

All that exists in terms of attitudes, thoughts, and created physical things exist ultimately so that God might display His glory. The Greek word for “*disobedience*” used in verse 32 actually means “*not to allow oneself to be convinced.*” God has allowed humankind intellectually and morally to fall into a state where they do not allow themselves to be convinced of the truth of God in the Bible. So the only way they can be saved is outside of their own power through the mercy of God. If you are a believer, you are a believer



because God has been merciful to you. Therefore, all the praise and glory go to whom they belong. The praise and glory go to God.

When we read in verse 32 that “*He might show mercy to all,*” that doesn’t mean of course that all people will be saved. It means that all believing Jews and Gentiles are saved. Can you keep from praising and glorifying God for giving you salvation if you possess it, when you consider the alternative? How can you help but praise God for giving you an eternity in the glory of Heaven compared to the horrors of Hell where you would be going without His mercy. Then Paul ends this chapter with a doxology beginning in Romans 11:33:

*33 O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How **unsearchable** are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

*34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”*

*35 “Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?”*

*36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.*

This doxology is telling us that God is incomprehensible. There is no way with our limited minds that we can truly understand a God who has no limitations. There is simply nothing that He can’t do. And the way He does many of these things we simply couldn’t understand. Psalm 139:1-6 further emphasizes this quality of God:

*1 O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me.*

*2 You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my every thought when far away.*

*3 You chart the path ahead of me and tell me where to stop and rest. Every moment you know where I am.*

*4 You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord.*

*5 You both precede and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head.*

***6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to know!***

Paul ends this chapter in which he has confirmed God’s sovereignty and God’s integrity and God’s generosity to the Jew and Gentile. He shows us how God’s plan comes all the way to completion, where both the Gentiles are redeemed and the Jewish nation is redeemed. The whole plan of God is going to work out gloriously. Having identified God in a way that recognizes His faithfulness and His saving mercy, a God who controls history and fulfills all His promises, Paul simply can’t help bursting into a song of praise in these last few verses.

Paul is saying “*Oh what a God we have! What a plan He is unfolding!*” Paul is in absolute awe of God’s plan here as he closes the chapter. He cannot help but praise and glorify a God of such love and mercy. Just compare this ending with the way Paul began this section in Romans 9:1 with **sorrow and heaviness of heart** as he thought about the

present lostness of Israel:

*1 In the presence of Christ, I speak with utter truthfulness—I do not lie—and my conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm that what I am saying is true.*

*2 **My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief***

*3 for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them.*

*4 They are the people of Israel, chosen to be God's special children. God revealed his glory to them. He made covenants with them and gave his law to them. They have the privilege of worshiping him and receiving his wonderful promises.*

*5 Their ancestors were great people of God, and Christ himself was a Jew as far as his human nature is concerned. And he is God, who rules over everything and is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.*

But now as Paul thinks about the future salvation of that nation, he rejoices. We might close with this footnote. The future salvation of Israel is not going to be retroactive. Any Jew up to that time who lives and dies without Christ lives and dies without Christ, without a second chance. Paul has sorrow because of that, but he has joy to realize that ultimately there will be a nation of Jews who will believe when God's plan comes to fulfillment. So Paul is filled with awe and wonder and praise, and he doesn't feel this way only about the things that God hasn't yet revealed, but by the things that God has revealed. He's in awe how God could pull all this off and make it happen. Paul is overwhelmed by God in every way. So we live in faith because we can be assured that what such a God tells us is true. What He has given us is only a sample of how much more there is that we can trust. That's why it is so foolish when we question Him. God is graceful and merciful and we'll never be able to comprehend the depth of His grace and mercy. How thankful Betty and I are to have such a God. We hope you are too.