

# Mercy for All

## Romans 11:25-32

John Ensor in his book **The Great Work of the Gospel**, he examines the question of what motivates God to make the astonishing offer to forgive all our sins? Taking his cue from Jonathan Edwards, Ensor says it's all about God's mercy:

*God desires to make his mercy the apex of his own glory in the eyes of all creation. It is the ultimate reason for the creation of the world and the plan of redemption. It is the ultimate reason we should believe he is ready to do a great work of grace in us! (p. 28)*

God wants to display His great glory by demonstrating His great mercy. Ensor expands this thought by quoting something Dana Olson wrote:

*Prior to creation God had no means of revealing one pinnacle attribute of his glory, mercy. While he could within the fellowship of the Trinity express love and maintain justice, mercy inherently requires some injustice or inadequacy before loving-kindness can be expressed in forgiveness. For this reason God set in motion redemptive history—to manifest his glory by revealing this very capacity to redeem, mercy. (p. 28)*

As Paul concludes his teaching here in Romans 9-11, he focuses on God's mercy against the backdrop of mankind's disobedience. Ray Pritchard has written:

*Without sin there can be no mercy because misery is seen most clearly where sin is most abundant. That is why God endures with great patience the disobedient because without the disobedient there could be no forgiveness, and without forgiveness there could be no display of mercy.*

We need God's mercy. We must believe that God's mercy is boundless, free and, through Jesus Christ our Lord, available to us now in our present situation. And when we understand the magnificence of God's mercy, it will banish from us all arrogance and we will humbly worship the awesome glory of God.

Throughout the course of Romans 9-11 Paul has been addressing one primary question: did God's promise fail since Israel largely rejected Jesus as the Messiah? In these three chapters Paul gives at least seven different answers to the question. God's purposes have not failed because,

1. True Israelites are those who have the faith of Abraham, not just those who are born Jews. (9:6-24)
2. God always said that not all Israel would be saved and that some Gentiles would be. (9:25-29)
3. The unbelief of the Jews was their own responsibility, not God's (9:30-10:21)
4. Some Jews (Paul included) have believed and been saved (11:1)
5. God has always worked through a remnant (11:2-10)
6. The salvation of the Gentiles is meant to arouse Israel to jealousy and be the means of saving some of them (11:11-24)

Our text today gives us the seventh answer

7. In the end the nation of Israel will be saved, and everyone will see that God has honored His promises toward Israel. (Romans 11:25-32)

Listen for God's mercy as I read Romans 11:25-32

**25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.**

**26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;**

**27 For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." , Isaiah 59:21**

**28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.**

**29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.**

**30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience,**

**31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy.**

**32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.**

Paul drives home the point that appears to be one of the major aims of this section of Romans, God's mercy. Though he is heading for the great doxology in verses 33-36 that extols the Lord for His wisdom, knowledge, judgments, and ways, he does so by the demonstration of His mercy. Paul exults in God's great mercy! And so should we. Yet what he has written seems hard to grasp in light of the contemporary Jewish rejection of the Messiah. So first, Paul explains:

## **I. A MYSTERY REVEALED**

The Nature of the Mystery A mystery, in the Bible, is something we would not have understood apart from the revelation of God. The mystery Paul reveals can be stated in a few statements,

Israel's hardening is temporary (v. 25)

The hardening will continue until the fullness of Gentiles has come in (v. 25)

So all Israel will be saved (v. 26)

Notice the reason Paul gives for telling us about God's plan for Israel. Verse 25, **"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion."** He wants to keep us from being arrogant. He wants us to understand that even though Israel stands against Christian belief right now, they are still chosen by God and will eventually turn to the Savior themselves. Ignorance often breeds arrogance. But true wisdom breeds humility. Paul's prescription for Gentile arrogance is to expose and to expound a mystery.

1. Partial hardening, **"that blindness in part has happened to Israel."** (25)

Paul restates what he has already shown. Not every Jew has rejected the gospel. Most had at that point. Yet the Lord had kept a believing remnant for Himself (11:1-6). Jews were still coming to Christ but not in the sweeping way that took place at Pentecost. There was more of a trickle rather than a rushing river of new Jewish believers. Yet the reality of those who believed pointed still to the greatness of God's mercy. They went against the grain of public opinion to believe in Jesus Christ and follow after Him. These

believers were willing to face rejection and persecution for the sake of Christ, just as many today do the same, going against the commonplace rejection of Christ.

## 2. A point of shifting **“until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”** (25)

The second component of the mystery is **“until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”** What does he mean? **“Fullness”** implies the full measure or the full number of Gentiles. Jesus came first to the lost house of Israel, yet they rejected Him. The gospel first came to the Jews as a testimony of God’s faithfulness to His covenant promises then it began to spread. We see this incrementally in the early chapters of Acts with the gospel going to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch. Then the gospel transformed the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household. Due to persecution, the gospel began to spread through Syria, the Mediterranean Islands, and into Asia Minor. Gentiles believed the gospel, at least in small number. But through God’s movement in the Antioch church, the gospel began to spread in vast numbers to the Gentiles. Soon, Gentile converts surpassed Jewish believers. And that has continued through the centuries even to our own day.

But what Paul points out is that a time will come when “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” In other words, the full number of elect Gentiles will be saved. All those elected before creation and purchased by the bloody death of Christ will respond to the call of the gospel. So Paul anticipates a fulfillment of the in missionary work to the masses of Gentile people groups. He does not identify the time, just the certainty.

It remains the task of the church today to pursue the people from every corner of the world who do not know the Lord before that time draws to a close.

## 3. Salvation of Israel **“And so all Israel will be saved.”** (26)

The third component to the mystery is perhaps the most mysterious to us in light of the present attitude of Jews toward the gospel. **“And so all Israel will be saved.”**

What does “all Israel will be saved” mean? Paul is not expressing a holy wish, “I hope that someday all Israel will be saved,” but rather a prophetic certainty: “All Israel will be saved.”

What does Paul mean by the term “Israel” here? Many early church fathers and later the Reformers and their followers argued that “all Israel” refers to all of God’s elect throughout history, both Jews and Gentiles. In Galatians 6:16 Paul seems to use the term Israel in this way. But in Romans 9-11 Paul uses “Israel” ten times and every use refers to ethnic Israel. The context of these chapters deals with the question of why the Jews were not coming to Christ while the Gentiles were. And clearly “Israel” in 11:25 and “they” in 11:28 both refer to the Jews in contrast to the Gentiles. So it is unlikely that Paul would change his meaning in 11:26.

Another view is that “all Israel” refers to the elect within Israel (as in 9:6 when Paul says, “For they are not all Israel who are of Israel”). The meaning here would then be that eventually the full number of the elect Jews will come to salvation. But this is kind of stating the obvious. And, this would require a shift in meaning between 11:25, where “Israel” refers to the nation generally, to a more narrow meaning in 11:26. Also, it is hard to understand how the completion of the number of elect Jews will be seen as a dramatic event referred to as “life from the dead” (11:15). And so the best meaning is that “all Israel” means the nation in general.

But what does “all” mean?

But this certainly does not mean every single Jew is going to be saved any more than the “fullness of the Gentiles” means every Gentile will become a believer. The phrase

“all Israel” is used often in the Old Testament to refer to most of the nation, but not to every single Jew in the nation.

Let me illustrate. We might say the whole town was at the recent football game. We don’t really mean that we surveyed the community and found that every single person was at the game. We mean there was a very large number of the community was at the game.

In much the same way, the Bible is not telling us that every Jewish person will trust Jesus as Savior. However, we do understand that something remarkable is going to happen. I believe that Paul is teaching there will be a massive turning to Christ by Jews in the future. No longer will God be working with just a remnant. It will be the whole nation in general who will turn to Christ for salvation.

When will this happen? The only thing that Paul tells us is that the partial hardening that precedes the multitude of Jews coming to Christ is separated by “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” He does not give us a timeline or try to squeeze it into our end time charts.

How will it happen? Will Jews be saved by adherence to the Law? Absolutely not! It is only through faith in Jesus Christ that any are saved, including Jews. “Just as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob’.” So the Jews will be saved through believing that the Messiah did come, and in that coming, He has delivered us from our sins by His own death and resurrection.

## **2. A PROMISE KEPT**

why is God so generous in saving those who want nothing to do with Him? “This is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” It has to do with God’s covenant promises to Israel. Paul actually quotes from Isaiah 59:20 and Jeremiah 31:33, both addressing the New Covenant. The Lord made the covenant promise to write His law on their hearts and be their God, and they His people. Paul insists, God’s not finished fulfilling this promise. For as He does, whenever that time comes, God alone gets the glory.

Notice the statement in verse 29 **“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”** Paul wants us to understand that when God makes a promise, He keeps it.

Throughout the Old Testament God promised that Israel would be His chosen people. God meant His promise then and He means it now.

Do you see Paul wrapping up his argument? He began the discussion back in Romans 9 addressing the question of God’s integrity. Can He be trusted to do what He says? Will God deliver on His promises? I know these three chapters in Romans have been difficult. Understand why Paul has taken such time with the issue of Israel. God’s integrity is essential to faith.

Do you understand what a crucial issue this is to you and to me? If God cannot be trusted to deliver on His promises to Israel, how can we know that He will truly forgive us? If He is not trustworthy how can we believe Jesus when He said, “He who believes in me will live even though He die?” How can we be sure “all things will work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose?” How can we have any confidence that God will supply our needs or that God has any control over history at all?

## **3. A MERCY EXTENDED**

Paul follows his declaration of God’s integrity with a reminder of God’s mercy.

Jesus told a parable about two men going to pray. One was a well-respected Pharisee, the other a despised tax-collector. The Pharisee prayed with fluent words and sounded wonderfully spiritual. The Tax-Collector, on the other hand, didn't even look to Heaven when he said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

Those who listened to the story certainly believed that the tax-collector should be asking for mercy. There was no doubt that he needed to bow before the Lord. Jesus shocked his audience however, when he told them, "I tell you that this man (the tax-collector), rather than the other went home justified before God." (Luke 18:9-14)

Jesus wanted the people to understand that we must recognize our sin before we can every receive God's mercy. We are all dependent on God's mercy whether we are Jews or Gentiles, rich or poor, respected or despised, outgoing or shy, powerful or oppressed. Every one of us must come to God the same way.

Paul tells us that God has "**bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.**" Paul is saying God has allowed us to become addicted to sin in the hope that it will cause us to cry out for help and allow Him to extend His mercy to us.

Some people will take that last phrase in verse 31, "mercy on them all," to imply that everyone is going to be saved in the end. This is foolish thinking. The entire context of the book of Romans paints for us two roads: the road to eternal life and the road to eternal judgment. Paul is clear that no one can be saved or made right with God apart from the work of God that brings them to faith and trust. It is better to understand Paul as saying God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he might have mercy on them all (both the Gentiles and the Jews).

## CONCLUSIONS

Let's draw some practical lessons. First, we are reminded again to guard against spiritual arrogance. We have talked about this principle in every sermon on Romans 11. Paul is attempting to combat a very human tendency. We often cherish and celebrate the fact that we have received God's mercy and grace and then turn around and insist others jump through the hoops we establish for them.

Our challenge is to view people with the eyes of the Father. Paul told the Romans that Israel was in one sense their enemies (because they opposed the gospel), but on the other hand were loved by God. In the same way, there are people we meet in life who do not treat us well. They are in one sense our enemies. In those times of frustration and hurt we must remind ourselves that God may view those same people in a different way. We need to look at others to see what God sees in them.

We are reminded to rest in God's Sovereign control over History. I've enjoyed watching the men of our church working at the parsonage. I must confess there are times I have no idea what they are doing. As I continue to watch them work, I begin to see that there is a plan. There is a purpose for the holes in the cement, a purpose and system in all those dangling wires, and there is a purpose for the piles of wood.

Isn't it great to be reminded that God has a plan for the world? We watch the news and it seems like things are out of control. We look at the closed doors of opportunity in our lives and wonder what is going on. We face various adversities and we wonder why God doesn't like us. This passage reminds us that God has a plan. He is weaving the various movements of history and the various circumstances of our lives for His glory and for the benefit of those who put their faith in Him.

If you are churning today, and most of us are churning about something, I encourage you to rest in the providence of our Father in Heaven. Your life may seem to be a mess

of broken up concrete and dangling wires. . . but the Master builder has a plan. Trust Him.

We should be spurred to action.

Paul warns us that there is a time coming when the door of opportunity will close. Our life could end in a moment through a physical problem or an accident. The Lord may come back to earth at any time. We just don't know. To continue to push spiritual issues aside because you have more important things to do is the height of foolishness.

Take this warning to heart. Ask yourself if you are more like the Pharisee or the Tax-collector in Jesus parable. Are you putting your confidence in your goodness, your good looks, your religious practices or your fine reputation? Or have you come to the Lord with your heart humbled and your hands open, seeking the mercy that only God can give? I know you have many important things to do. You probably have many significant demands on your time. However, is there anything in your life that has a greater and more long-lasting significance than your relationship with God? Don't keep putting it off. You never know when you will be out of time.

A famous gospel song contains these lines:

*Mercy there was great, and grace was free,  
Pardon there was multiplied to me;  
There my burdened soul found liberty  
At Calvary.*

The end of the road for Jew and Gentile alike is the mercy of God, but that road to mercy leads through the experience of disobedience. Sometimes we say of certain criminals, "We should lock them up and throw away the key." But that's not what God says about you and men. He locks us up, and then he holds out the key of mercy, the only key that will unlock the prison door and set us free.

All of us are sinners.

All of us are locked in the prison of sin.

God has the only key that will set us free.

He offers to open the door to anyone who cries out for His mercy.