

Romans 9

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 July 2020

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good morning and a warm welcome to the service this morning. Those who are listening in and those who are watching online, once again it's good for us to come together to worship God.

Just as usual to highlight that the evening service will be online just before six o'clock tonight and we will go to Psalm 127 for the evening service and YF will be on at half past seven tonight and the prayer meeting at half past seven on Wednesday, both these meetings on Zoom so please be encouraged to come to these meetings. We're going to begin this time of worship by saying to God's praise and we sing from Psalm 100. Psalm 100, the whole of the psalm. All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. Him serve with mirth as praise forth tell. Come ye before him and rejoice.

All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. Him serve with mirth as praise forth tell.

Come ye before him and rejoice. Know that the Lord is God indeed. Without doubt it he did us make. We are for his flock he doth us feed. And for his sheep he doth us take. O enter then his gate with praise. Approach with joy his praise the Lord and bless his name always. Praise the Lord and bless his name always. For it is for his name always. For it is for his name always. Let's unite our hearts in prayer. Let's pray together. Our heavenly Father once more we thank you for the privilege of coming into your presence and we thank you for the gift of prayer. We thank you for this hour of worship and for the psalm that we thank you for the psalm that we thank you for the psalm that we have sung which leads us into that place of worship. We thank you for the God who made us. You are our maker. You are our creator. And you are the God who sustains us. You care for us. As the good shepherd cares for the sheep. We thank you for the God who cares for us. Jesus said I am the good shepherd.

And we thank you for the good shepherd. And we thank you for the good shepherd. And we thank you for the God who is our savior. And as we think upon Christ we thank you for all that he did to make it possible. For those whom he made and those whom he sustains to be saved eternally.

[4 : 46] We are always conscious. We are always conscious. We are sinners who fall short of your standard. We cannot come into your presence in our own name and on the basis of our own works.

But we thank you for Jesus our savior. We thank you for all that he did on the cross to pay the price for our sin. To take our sin as far away as the east is from the west. And to make us right with God.

We thank you for the cross. We thank you for the fact that Jesus died. But not only died but rose again. And we thank you for that promise of everlasting life for all who are trusting him.

And even as the psalmist spoke of joy. We thank you for the joy that we have when we take hold of the salvation that is ours in Christ.

And we think about that gift of salvation. And we wonder why it is that you loved us enough to send your son into this world, Lord God, to die for us.

- [5 : 54] And there is no answer to that question other than the fact that you are the God who is love. There was nothing in us to make us attractive whilst we were still sinners.
- Christ died for us. And we thank you for that deep, deep love of Jesus that saves us and keeps us eternally. We thank you for the hope of the gospel.
- And we pray that each one of us as we listen in, as we watch online, that we would know the reality of that hope in our lives.
- Help us, we pray, to be able to say that you are our God, that the Lord Jesus is our shepherd. Because we thank you that when he is our shepherd, he is the one who guides us through life.
- And through death even, into life that's everlasting. We thank you for the comfort of these truths. Even as we think upon the weak past, we are conscious of those who are grieving.
- [6 : 58] Lord, as a congregation we are grieving. As we miss John Norman, who has passed from time into eternity, we feel that sense of loss. But we thank you, Lord, for the encouragement that we are given as we think upon the gospel.
- We thank you that the promise of God is that those who say, be merciful to me, a sinner, are made righteous. We thank you that those who are saying, the Lord is my shepherd, have the promise of that eternal security.
- And so we pray, Lord, for those whom Jim Norman has left behind in the home. We pray for Nanny especially. We ask that you would comfort her, that you would strengthen her.
- That you would carry her through this difficult time. And for all of the children, Lord, and for the grandchildren, we leave the entire family in your loving care.
- And we pray that they would know your presence and that they would know your peace. We pray for all who are struggling at this time. Those who are grieving.
- [8 : 08] Those who are suffering with ill health. Those who are suffering financially through this difficult time. Those who are suffering under worry and the pressures of this life.
- We thank you that we can carry them to you in prayer. And as they come into our mind's eye, we ask that you would sustain them, that you would help them. We pray for us as a nation, Lord.
- We say it often, but we have drifted far from you. And we ask, Lord, that in this time, this far from normal time, when so much that we consider normal in the past has been taken away from us.
- We pray that in this period, that you would be working in such a way as to cause us to look to yourself. Give us that spirit of repentance, we pray, as a nation.
- That we would turn back to the book that once we were known for. And that we would turn back to the Lord who inspired the book. That we would look to the Lord Jesus, the Word made flesh.
- [9 : 13] So, Lord, be at work, we pray, in our nation. We pray that you would be at work in your church. We need your reviving touch. And we know, Lord, that you are a God who hears our prayers and who heals our land when we cry out to you.
- So, hear our prayers for your church. Hear our prayers for this land. Hear our prayers for ourselves as individuals.
- Lord, we are needy. But we thank you that we can come to the God who is able to meet all of our needs. Be at work, we pray. Glorify your name in and through us.
- Help us, we pray, as we open your Word. And guide us and lead us in this time of worship. And we ask all these things in Jesus' name. And for Jesus' sake. Amen.
- Boys and girls, it's good to know that you're on the other side of that camera this morning.

[10 : 16] And I don't have anything to show you this morning. But I wanted to tell you about something that I've been signed up for. Sometimes you don't actually choose to do something, but you realize you've been signed up for something.

And this week I got a message through to say that I've been signed up for a step challenge. I think that's what it's called, a step challenge. And the idea of it is quite simple.

You have to count your steps in a day. So you can use your phone and your phone counts your steps. Or you can have one of these pedometer things or some watches count your steps.

So I got signed up for that. And when I heard about that, I thought, well, okay, that's not too bad. I think I did quite a few steps because I walk short and I go for a run from my exercise quite often.

So I thought, I'll probably be okay with the step challenge. And then all the results started coming in. And I was seeing, you're all against each other.

[11 : 20] There's teams that are against each other. Teenie's in a different team. And I saw Teenie had a result of 30,000 plus steps for one day. And I looked at my watch and I only had about 5,000.

And then Michaela was on one day when I looked. Has she done 52,000 steps? How on earth she did that, I don't know. But she must be going all day long with her steps.

And yesterday, I took a note of what I did yesterday. You know how many steps I did yesterday? 1,006. So I'm in trouble.

And I was saying to Mary, I'm never going to get through this step challenge. And somebody said to me, here's a good idea. You know what you could do? You could strap your watch to Shoros the dog.

Just let him off outside. And he just charges around the garden all day long. Take him to the beach. He does 50 times as many steps as you do when he's on the beach, charging around all over the place.

[12 : 25] You could tie the watch to Shoros and he'll get you a great score. And I thought, hmm, that's true, isn't it? I thought, there's some people in the village I could tie it to.

I'll get a great score. Kathy Campbell. She does lots of steps and she does them very fast. If I was to put my watch in her pocket when she wasn't looking, I'd get a good score. And I thought about that for a wee while, for a wee while longer than I should have.

And I thought, hmm, that wouldn't be fair, would it? Because the other people would do all the work and I would do nothing. And that made me think of our being saved.

When we were praying, we were praying about how Jesus saves us, how we are saved. Now, what does that mean?

Well, you know what it means. It means that we're saved from our sin. It means that we're given everlasting life. Now, how do we get that? Well, it's not because God is being fair with us.

[13 : 36] It's because God has shown us mercy. And he's showing us grace. We don't save ourselves. But Jesus does it all for us.

What do we deserve if we think about fairness? Well, if I think about my life, what do I deserve? Well, I deserve punishment for the sins that I do. But God doesn't give me punishment for the sins that I've done.

Because Jesus has taken it from me. And that's what we call mercy. And I don't deserve the gift of everlasting life. But Jesus gives it to us.

And that's what we call grace. So, what do we do to get saved? Well, we do nothing. Because Jesus has done everything.

The gift of God, it says in Romans 6, is eternal life. All we have to do is receive it.

[14 : 46] And that's a great thing. So, let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of eternal life. We thank you that we don't have to work and step our way through all the different steps of religion.

To try to earn our way or work our way to having eternal life. Because we thank you that Jesus has done it all for us. We thank you that he has taken the punishment for our sin upon himself.

We thank you that he is able to offer to us the everlasting life that is found in him. And we thank you that all that we have to do is receive it.

So, help us, Lord, we pray. Help the boys and girls. Help all of us as we listen in and as we watch to be those who take hold of the everlasting life that we didn't work for and we didn't pay for.

But is offered to us freely in Jesus. And we ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's turn now to God's Word and to Romans chapter 9.

[16 : 03] And we'll read the whole of this chapter. I speak the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit. I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption of sons.

Theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs. And from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God, over all, forever praised.

Amen. It is not as though God's Word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Not because they are descendants are they all Abraham's children.

On the contrary, it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

[17 : 11] For this was how the promise was stated. At the appointed time, I will return and Sarah will have a son. Not only that, but Rebecca's children had one and the same father, her father Isaac.

Yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose and election might stand, not by works, but by him who calls, she was told, What then shall we say?

Is God unjust? Not at all. For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

It does not therefore depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. One of you will say to me, Then why does God still blame us?

[18 : 26] For who resists his will? But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, Why did you make me like this?

Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes, and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of wrath prepared for destruction?

What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy whom he prepared in advance for glory? Even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews, but also from the Gentiles.

As he says in Hasea, I will call them my people who are not my people, and I will call her my loved one who is not my loved one. And it will happen in the very place where it was said to them, You are not my people.

They will be called sons of the living God. Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand of the sea, only the remnant will be saved.

[19 : 39] For the Lord will carry out the sentence on earth with speed and finality. It is just as Isaiah said previously, Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah.

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have obtained it. A righteousness is by faith. But Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.

Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith, but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. As it is written, See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.

And the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. Amen. And may God bless our reading of his word to us.

Let's pray now before we come back to God's word. Heavenly Father, once more we ask that you would help us, that you would send the Holy Spirit to be our teacher, to be our guide, that we would hear your voice, that we would know your presence, that we would be those who have our hearts stirred as we reflect upon your word.

[21 : 06] Speak to us, we pray, and help us to have ears to hear. What we pray for ourselves here, we pray for every denomination in the churches around us, in this community, and in the island, and across the nation, and across all nations.

Lord God, be at work, we pray, building your church, as we know, Lord, that you have promised that you will be. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. I don't know how many of you would have been on a roller coaster in your life.

Some of the younger people probably have been in one at some stage. And even if you've not been in one, you'll know what they are. These train tracks, these terrifying looking train tracks and theme parks that go up and down and they go around and through water and all kinds of things.

And you get into these little carts and you get strapped in and in a matter of seconds, you're flying very uncomfortably, sometimes terrifyingly, from great heights to great depths.

That's the kind of thing that we know in a roller coaster ride. And going from Romans chapter 8 to Romans chapter 9, it's a bit of a roller coaster ride.

[22 : 31] At the end of Romans chapter 8, if you just glance back at it for a moment, Paul is expending the great heights of the love of God. And he says there in verse 37 through to the end, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am convinced, says the Apostle Paul, that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And we can almost sense that excitement bursting out of the Apostle Paul as he takes us to these heights of the glory of the gospel.

We can almost hear the cheers and the hallelujahs and the amens coming from the Apostle Paul and the congregation in Rome as they hear this, as they're taken to this high point in Scripture.

But then when we turn the page over from Romans 8 to Romans 9, it's as if we plummet down into the depths of Paul's heart.

[23 : 51] It's very abrupt in the change. Paul says in verse 1, I speak the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit.

I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. Now this is not, I think, where we expected this letter to go.

I don't think this is where they would have expected this letter to go in their first reading of it. Having gone to such heights, we almost expect Paul to continue soaring towards the end of this letter, but that's not where the Holy Spirit took Paul.

He's taken from the heights to the depths of this unceasing anguish. So what is causing this? Well, it's his great sorrow for the lost.

And that's our first point. Great sorrow for the lost. I speak the truth in Christ, he says. I'm not lying. My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit.

[24 : 57] I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. Now who are the lost that Paul is so much in anguish over?

Who are they specifically in this context that are causing the apostle to have such sorrow? Well, it's the Jewish people. It's my brothers, says Paul.

It's those of my own race, says the apostle Paul, verse 4. For the people of Israel. As he looks at his own country, men and women, he feels such a sense of sorrow and sadness.

Sometimes when we think about our own nation, we think about our nation and our fellow nationals with a sense of love and pride.

We find a kinship and a camaraderie with our own people. But Paul, as he thinks about his own brothers, his heart is breaking.

[26 : 05] He has great love for them and yet they cause him great sorrow and unceasing anguish. Now why is that? Well, it's because they are lost.

It's because they are outside of Christ. And we could ask Paul the question, how is it that they are lost, Paul? Is it because God has not given them direction in order that they could be found?

And Paul answers in the course of this chapter, no. God has given them great direction. He's given them great privileges. And he outlines them in verses 4 and 5.

He says, theirs is the adoption of sons. Theirs, the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises.

Theirs are the patriarchs and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ who is God overall, forever praised. Amen. Paul says here, his own people, they've been given great direction from God.

[27 : 13] they have been given great privileges from God. And we can look back into the Old Testament and we can see how loving and how attentive and how long-suffering God was with his people Israel.

He adopted them as his people. He revealed himself to them in his glory. He entered into covenant relationships with them.

He gave them his law through which they saw his holy character. He led them in worship. He gave them so many great and weighty promises.

He gave them these great patriarchs, these great men of God who led them and who pointed them to the Messiah. And he gave them his own son, Jesus, who was born and raised in a Jewish family.

I mean, how privileged the Jewish people were. And yet, they had despised these privileges, the majority of them, as they rejected Christ and the salvation that is offered in Christ and as they determined, they would go their own way and they would persevere on a lost course.

[28 : 38] And Paul, in his great sense of sorrow, he feels this so keenly. He says in verse 3, For I wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

There's a huge intensity of sorrow that the apostle feels as he looks at his own lost people. We see something of the heart of Christ in the apostle Paul as he says that.

We can think about Jesus. Remember, when Jesus, he saw Jerusalem, he saw these people as they rejected him and he wept over the city.

And Paul here is weeping over his people as they continue to reject Jesus. He is great sorrow for the lost.

And the question I think that we have to ask in application here is do we share something of Paul's sorrow for the lost?

[29 : 58] If we are those who are in Christ, if we are Christians and we look around and we see those who are out of Christ, do we share something of Paul's sorrow for the lost?

Because as we look at our own nation, we see the parallels immediately. Just as the Jewish nation had great spiritual privileges, so have we.

I think, if my history is right, we've had the gospel in Scotland for about 1500 years. We have Bibles in every house and if we don't have a Bible in our house we can get one in seconds.

We have grown up knowing about Jesus. We have had people who have faithfully taught us about Jesus and just as the Jewish nation rejected Jesus, we as a nation are now rejecting Jesus.

we are removing him from schools. We are removing his word from hospitals. We are removing Christianity from the public square.

[31 : 07] We are setting aside the Bible. We are rejecting salvation. We are determined to go our own way. That's our national situation.

But even if we think about the local level, even as we look out our window, yes we can be encouraged on some Sunday mornings when we see a good number of people in church and we think about the other people who are in different churches in this place but we need to remember that there are many more people in this community who are not going to church than who are going to church.

there are many people in this community and we love them and we live with them and we share our lives with them and they are lost.

They are outside of Christ. And if that doesn't change, they will be forever lost. The Bible teaches us that those who are outside of Christ as they go from time into eternity will remain outside of Christ for all eternity.

They will spend eternity in hell. Now, if you are a Christian, if we are Christians, how does that make us feel? Do we share something of Paul's great sorrow and unceasing anguish for the lost?

[32 : 43] I think you and I need a greater measure of that sorrow. That we would be driven to our knees and that we would be driven out of our church buildings as we have been and driven out of our homes and into the community with the message of the gospel.

Jesus didn't say to the disciples, disciples, tell the lost to come in. He told the saved to go out with the message of the good news about Jesus.

the first point we see here is Paul's great sorrow for the lost. The second point we come to hear is this great promise that God made and the question, is it broken?

You see a great promise and the question has been asked in Paul's hearing. Is this promise, has God's word been broken? See, because of Israel's rejection of Jesus, not only was the apostle Paul's heart hurting, he thought about the state of those whom he loved, but his head was hurting, at least at first it was hurting because this raised a question about the reliability of God's word.

We can go back into the Old Testament and we read and we hear so many great promises that God made to Israel and the question that was now coming to the surface was, have these promises been broken?

[34 : 28] Were these covenants that God made, were they not worth anything? Had God's word failed? That was the troubling question that Paul begins to address and in verse 6 Paul begins to answer it and he says right from the get-go here, it is not as though God's word had failed.

I like the immediacy with which Paul responds to this question. Paul's response is it's instinctive. It's like a spiritual reflex action.

You know when we go to the doctor sometimes to get a check over, they check this and that and the next thing and they get that wee hammer or they used to anyway and they knock it just I think below the knee and your leg moves.

Without you trying to move it, the leg moves when the hammer hits that particular point. It's a reflex action. This is Paul's reflex action to this question that has been discussed.

Paul is in relationship with God. He knows God. He loves God. He trusts God and so he knows instinctively that God's word has not failed.

[35 : 47] He knows that God's promises had not and could not be broken. That's his instinctive gut reaction. He just knows it. Sometimes we might hear something about another person, something cruel or dishonest that they're supposed to have said and done and we say instinctively when we hear it, that can't be true.

And why do we say that? Is it because we have all the facts about the situation in front of us, on the table before us and we're able to make a determination from the point of fact?

No, we come out with responses like that because we know the person and we say that can't be true because I know them. They just wouldn't do that.

And it's because Paul knows God, because he knows that God was willing to send his own son Jesus to a cross to keep the promise of salvation that he can say immediately, God's great promises to Israel are not, cannot, will not be broken.

And having said that by way of an instinctive reaction, he now goes on to think through the explanation of that. And you can read through Paul's explanation in verses 6 through to verse 13.

[37 : 13] I have to watch time so I'm not going to trawl through the detail of it. But the summary of it actually I think is found in verse 6. Paul says, for not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.

One commentator, Kofi, I think it was an explanation clearer and quicker than I can. So let me give it to you. He says, the point to grasp is that not everyone in Israel was included in the covenant promise.

God granted it only to specific individuals he chose. In the years that followed, Jews did not automatically inherit God's promises just because they were physically part of Israel.

If they inherited the promises, it was because of God's free choice. and their spiritual fidelity to God's word, not because of any natural advantages of birth or family inheritance.

I remember hearing about a conversation that happened here in Tarbor one evening after a funeral.

[38 : 27] And at this funeral, Isaiah 43 was read as it often is read at funerals. And these verses were heard. But now this is what the Lord says, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel, fear not, for I have redeemed you.

I have summoned you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned.

The flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. So that was the reading in the church.

And after the church service, the conversation went like this. And the genuine question I was asked immediately was, what does this have to do with us and Harris?

I mean, these are nice, comforting words to read for Israel. But why are they being read in Harris? And Paul's answer to that question is that these words are being read here because they apply here.

[39 : 37] There are some people who are in Israel who cannot claim these promises because they are outside of Christ. They reject Jesus. And yet there are some people who are in Harris who claim these promises rightly because they are in Christ and they are believing in Jesus.

So they are part of that new Israel, the church of Christ. God's great promises to Israel, the new Israel, those who are in Christ.

They have not, they are not, they cannot ever be broken. And the application for us is simply to take hold of that truth.

God's promises are always trustworthy. His word can always be depended upon.

God's promises to people. I remember being at a final account meeting in my old life before I was a minister. And there was various people who were all sitting around the table and extra works and the monies associated with it were all being disputed and I was trying to get things settled.

[41 : 06] And on the other side of the table there was a contracts manager. I've never forgotten his second name. His second name was Fox. Fox. And it was appropriate that his second name would be Fox.

He was a wily character. And we spent hours and hours trawling through the detail of these extra works to come to financial agreements.

And as the day came towards a close he stopped and he said, can I just make a point for clarification? I said, yes, go ahead.

He said, I just want you to be aware that these agreements that we have come to, they are in principle agreements and please don't make the mistake of thinking that any of them are binding.

And we all just about fell off our chairs. What was he saying? Well, he was saying nothing that we've agreed, nothing that we've promised, nothing that I have given you by way of my word can be relied upon.

[42 : 09] His promises were worth nothing. So I said, well, let's close the files and pack our bags and go home. This is a waste of time. And if God's word can't be trusted, we may as well close the books and go and do something else.

But Paul is saying emphatically here, of course God's word can be trusted. It is not, verse 6, as though God's word had failed.

God's great promises to Israel, to those who are in Christ, will never be broken. That's for our encouragement. Great promises, are they broken?

No, they are not broken. It's the second point. Third point is the question of great injustice. we sang in Psalm 100 to begin with, the Lord our God is good.

And the question that Paul picks up in the next section of this chapter, the question that we have to assume people were asking at that time is, is the Lord our God good?

[43 : 25] Is he righteous? Or is he unjust? And then in verse 14, in response to that question, once more we have Paul's reflex action.

He says in verse 14, what then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all. Why does Paul say that? Well, for the same reason he spoke before, because he knows God and he knows that God is a God of justice and we see that so clearly on the cross.

We sang last Sunday, I think it was, that hymn, Here is Love, Vast as the Ocean. One of the verses of that hymn go like this, on the mount of crucifixion, fountains open deep and wide, through the floodgates of God's mercy, flowed a vast and gracious tide, grace and love like mighty rivers poured incessant from above, and heaven's peace and perfect justice.

Kissed a guilty world in love. A God who was unjust, a God who did not care about justice, would not go to the cross to meet the demands of divine justice.

So is God unjust? Not at all. We can see that right from the start. God. But then as we go on here, and Paul moves from justice to a degree, he moves to thinking more widely about God's mercy and grace.

[45 : 10] Paul continues in this argument. As we think about mercy and grace, these are things that when God opens our eyes, we see them. And these are things that God gives us the faith to take hold of, but when we analyze and when we try to understand the workings of God's mercy and grace, we just can't.

We can't understand it. You know, if you show me the workings of some complex higher maths exam paper, I can't understand it. It's beyond me.

If you show me the workings of some complex chemical equation, it's beyond me. And the workings of God's electing mercy and grace are beyond us.

Verse 15, for he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

It does not therefore depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. There's a whole lot of mystery in that. Now, what can we say?

[46 : 26] Well, we can say this. If you and I are saved this morning, if we are those who have received God's mercy, we can be clear on this much.

We can be clear that it's not because of anything in us. It's not because we had a desire for God that God was able to see in us because we didn't. it's not because of our efforts to be good, because even our best efforts, as Isaiah says, are like filthy rags before God.

So if we are saved this morning, how can that be? It's because of God's great compassion. And that's both very humbling, and it's very mysterious when we start to ask the question why.

When we start to think through that question of why are some hearts open to receive mercy and why are other hearts hardened? It's a mystery.

Paul does begin to explore it a little more in verses 17 and following. He takes Pharaoh as an example going back to Exodus. He says in verse 17, for the scripture says to Pharaoh, I raised you up for this very purpose that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

[47 : 51] Therefore, again, Paul says God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and he hardens whom he wants to harden. That's the reality, that's the facts of it.

The single Ferguson says on this passage, God doesn't harden a heart that doesn't want to be hardened. And we see that in Pharaoh actually.

If we go back and look at that passage or these passages where we see Pharaoh in Exodus 8 and 9 and following, what's the story there?

Well, God comes to Pharaoh through Moses and he says to Pharaoh, let my people go. They were in slavery and God says to Moses, I want my people out of Egypt.

I want them released. And God speaks through Moses and says that clearly and God speaks through the plagues that came upon Egypt, but Pharaoh didn't want to listen.

[48 : 53] So we read in Exodus 8.15 and Exodus 8.32 that Pharaoh hardened his heart. God spoke that Pharaoh hardened his heart.

So what came next? We read in Exodus 9 and 10 and 11 and 14 that the Lord then hardened Pharaoh's heart.

Is that unjust? No, it's not. Does that answer all our questions? Probably not. It didn't answer all the questions that Paul was fielding.

Verse 19. One of you will say to me, then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will? And Paul comes back.

But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall have what is formed say to him who formed it? Why did you make me like this? Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay, some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

[50 : 07] These were the kinds of arguments that were floating around in Rome at that time. And I can guarantee that these arguments will still be floating around in the head of some who are listening and watching this morning.

and if you are listening this morning and if you're saying within your heart, why does God blame me for rejecting him?

And what should you do? Well, you should stop rejecting him. You should stop hardening your heart as Pharaoh did.

You should listen to the words of Psalm 95. Today, if you hear his voice, if this is penetrating, do not harden your heart. Because the warning through passages like this is if you keep hardening your heart, then you're in danger of God giving you eternally what you are choosing presently.

You're in danger of God's eternal hardening of your heart. I think a quote from C.S. Lewis is helpful at this point.

[51 : 25] C.S. Lewis says, there are only two kinds of people in the end. Those who say to God, thy will be done, and those to whom God says in the end, thy will be done.

All that are in hell choose it. Without that self choice, there could be no hell, no soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it.

Those who seek, find. Those who knock, it is opened. I'll give you one more quote that I find helpful from Malcolm McLean. He says, it is helpful to remind ourselves that Jesus spoke about election, and did so at the same time as giving a gospel invitation that stressed human responsibility.

responsibility. A clear example is John 6 37, where he says to his listeners, all that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me, I will never cast out.

The first clause, says McLean, describes election, and the second is an invitation that stresses human responsibility. Jesus did not see them as contradictory, but as connected.

[52 : 42] it may be that we cannot see the connection, but that does not mean it is there. It is not there, sorry. So is God unjust?

No, he is not unjust. There's a lot of mystery in this, but actually the mystery, I think, is something that should cause us to bow before him and not shake our fists at him.

Point four, great patience, verse 22. What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, were with great patience the object of his wrath, prepared for destruction?

Still with Pharaoh in our minds, if we glance back at Pharaoh into the Exodus account, we see that because he hardened his heart and because God hardened his heart, he became an object of wrath.

But as we look at that narrative, we see God's great patience. God could have wiped out Pharaoh in a moment, but he bore with him patiently.

[53 : 59] And as that narrative continues in Exodus, you can read it at your own leisure, we see so much of God's power and so much of God's mercy. God is a God of great patience.

Israel saw it and we still see it. If you look at verse 23 down to verse 29, I'm not going to take time to go through that, but we see various promises that are highlighted by the Apostle Paul in these verses and they are promises which relate to us.

their promises of God's salvation and his salvation is offered not just to the Jew, but it's to the Gentile. It's us.

We see here something of the details of God's plans to save all, every nation, every person who will look in faith to Jesus.

Encouragement for you and I this morning is that in God's great patience he is still calling us to come close to him. If you have never trusted Christ before, but you're hearing this, your heart is stirred, God is a God of great patience and he waits for us to come in faith to him and he promises that those who come to Jesus he will not drive away, but he will receive and he will save.

[55 : 38] The final point which takes us from verse 30 to the end is great grace. Paul finishes this chapter and you can see the verses there before you.

He finishes this chapter on the same note that he finishes so many chapters and so many sermons. He's saying to us, it's all about God's great grace.

Wednesday evening for those who were at the prayer meeting we read the parable that Jesus told in Luke 18 about those who were confident of their own righteousness and who looked down on everyone else.

And Jesus told this parable. Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee the other a tax collector. the Pharisee stood and prayed about himself, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men, robbers, evil doers, adulterers.

Or even like this tax collector, I fast twice a week, I give a tenth of all that I get. But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but he beat his breast and said, God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

[56 : 57] Jesus says, I tell you, that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. And Paul is saying here, that's the small scale as Jesus focuses in on two individuals.

And Paul, as he looks at nations here and whole swathes of people, he is saying salvation, it's all about God's grace.

The tax collector was justified, but the religious Jew was not. Why was that? It's because the religious Jew was trying to save himself and he was stumbling over Jesus.

But the tax collector, he understood God's great grace offered to us in Christ.

The one who puts their trust in him, it says in verse 33, the one who puts their trust in Jesus, in God's great grace, will never be put to shame.

[58 : 12] And that was the message, and that is still the message that the Pharisee and the Jewish nation and each of us needs to hear.

Yes, we are sinners, but we are sinners who can be saved when we look to God for mercy. When we come to the God who shows us such great patience, and when we receive from him that free and great grace.

So may we be encouraged to do so. Let's pray. Our heavenly father, we thank you for the encouragements that we are given even in this complicated and sometimes unsettling passage.

As we think through some of Paul's arguments, some of them go over our heads. They are too complex for him to grasp and for us to grasp.

But then you are the God of whom he writes and you are the God of whose ways are higher than our ways and whose thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

[59 : 29] So help us, Lord, we pray to trust you and to receive from you the salvation that is offered to us in Jesus. Help us to come as children, as Jesus taught us to.

Simply taking hold of what we can understand in Jesus and bowing in worship before you and leaving before you the things that are too much for us to grasp which should inspire us all the more to worship you as the God who is sovereign and yet the God who saves.

Hear our prayers. Help us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Son of God That love could remember no wrongs we have done omnish until knowing He counts not their sum thrown into the sea without bottom or shore ever since they are many His mercy is more praise Praise the Lord, His mercy is more.

Stronger than darkness, new every morn, For sins they are many, His mercy is more.

What patience would wait as we constantly roam, What Father so tender is calling us home, He welcomes the weakest, the vilest, the poor.

[61 : 43] Their sins they are many, His mercy is more. Praise the Lord, His mercy is more.

Stronger than darkness, new every morn, For sins they are many, His mercy is more.

What riches of kindness He lavished on us, His blood was the payment, His life was the cost, We stood, He's a debt we could never afford.

Our sins they are many, His mercy is more. Praise the Lord, His mercy is more.

Stronger than darkness, new every morn, For sins they are many, His mercy is more.

[63 : 13] Praise the Lord, His mercy is more.

Stronger than darkness, new every morn, For sins they are many, His mercy is more.

Praise the Lord, His mercy is more.

Stronger than darkness, new every morn, Stronger than darkness, new every morn, For sins they are many, His mercy is more.

For sins they are many, His mercy is more. Amen.