

Romans 11

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Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

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

Intimations, just to say first of all that the evening service should be online just before 6 this evening. YF will be on at half past 7 on Zoom and the prayer meeting on Zoom again at half past 7 this coming Wednesday.

And this Wednesday, Cammie will lead the prayer meeting and it will be a prayer only meeting. So, be encouraged to come to that. I hope to be on holiday for the next two Sundays.

I hope to be on holiday from the 17th of July through to the 3rd, 4th of August. So, if you're looking for a minister during that period, maybe to speak to one of the elders in the first instance and there's a couple of ministers who are available to give pastoral cover.

These, I think, are all the intimations. So, let's worship God and sing to His praise. We sing from Psalm 8, Psalm 8. How excellent in all the earth, Lord, our Lord is thy name, who hast thy glory far advanced above the starry frame.

[1 : 37] From infant's and from sockling's mouth, thou didst the name of the earth, How excellent in all the earth, Lord, our Lord is thy name, who hast thy glory far advanced above the starry frame.

From infant's and from sockling's mouth, thou didst strength ordain.

For thy false cause, that so thou mightst live vending for restraint. When I look up into the heavens, which thine own fingers framed, Unto the moon and to the stars, which were by thee ordained, Then say, I, what is man that he remembered is by thee?

Or what the son of man that thou so kind to him shouldst be?

For thou a little lower hast him than the angels made, With glory and with dignity thou crowned hast his head.

[3 : 23] Of thy hands works thou madest him, Lord, all under feet didst lay, All sheep and oxen, yea, and beasts that in the field do stray.

Fowls of the air, fish of the sea, All that pass through the same, How excellent in all the earth, Lord, our Lord is thy name.

Let's unite our hearts in prayer. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day, And we thank you once more that we are found at the beginning of your day.

In your presence, in some way we are joined together with your people, Even though it's to a different means to what we were used to in the past.

And we thank you that we have the promise that as we gather together in the name of Jesus, In our respective homes, that you will be with us. You're the God who is everywhere at all times.

[4 : 44] And you're the God who has promised that as we seek to draw near to you, You will draw near to us. So we pray that we would know and experience that nearness of God.

As we sing, as we pray, as we read your word, as we meditate upon your word, We pray that we would know that you are God and that you are with us. We thank you that you are the God who is all-glorious.

We see that in the psalm, and we see, as the psalm directs us to look around us in this world, To the beauty of creation. We are stirred to praise you for who you are, in your majesty and in your might.

And yet we thank you that you are the God who is mindful of man. You are mindful of each one of us. You care for us. You love us. And we see that love most clearly as we come to the cross of Jesus.

We thank you that God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son, That whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. We thank you for how that verse that's so familiar encapsulates the gospel message, The good news about Jesus.

[5 : 54] And we pray that you would give us faith, that we would believe, That we would know in our hearts that we are not those who are perishing or who will perish, But we pray that we would rest and rejoice in the eternal security and joy that there is in Christ.

So may we each one see Jesus this day and hear the voice of Jesus say, Come unto me and rest. We thank you, Lord, for the rest that we find in Christ.

And we thank you for the care that you show to us. And we pray for those who we're conscious of at this time, Who need your loving care and your hand upon them.

We pray on for those who are sick and those who are receiving treatment. We ask that that treatment would continue to be effective. We think especially of Ian Davidson and Shona as they go through a hard time.

Sustain them and uphold them, we pray. We pray on for those who are grieving, those whose hearts are sore. And we ask that you would be very close to them.

[7 : 03] And we pray again for Nanny. And we ask that she would know you as the God of all comfort, the Father of all compassion. We pray for those who are anxious at this time, some who are fearful.

We are conscious as we begin to speak to each other again as lockdown eases, that still there is anxiety and still there are worries and there are burdens and there are cares.

We thank you that we have a friend in Jesus. And we thank you that we can bring everything to you in prayer. So we pray for those who are struggling in these ways.

We pray for the heart of each person who is tuning in and listening in at this time. We see the congregation in our minds, although we can't see each other physically.

And we ask for each one that you would meet us, Lord, at the point of our need. We pray for those who are not yet Christians. We ask that you would open their eyes to see Jesus and to see their need of Jesus.

[8 : 02] We pray for those who are Christians and who have been on the road for some time. And we ask that you would keep them, that you would keep us fresh, help us to walk close with you.

We pray for some who have wandered from you, who may be in a backslidden state. And we ask that you would draw them back, that you would take them close. We thank you that you are the God who takes hold of us and who does not let us go.

And even though we are prone to wander, we thank you that you are always pulling us back. So help us, Lord, each one, to know your closeness and to know your hand upon us.

We pray for our nation as things begin to unlock, for wisdom. We pray that you would give wisdom to those in authority, both within the government and local government here.

We pray for the churches as well as we try to make decisions about when to open and how to manage restrictions. We ask that you would guide our hand through all of this, that you would give to us the wisdom that comes from heaven.

[9 : 11] And we pray for the gospel, for gospel progress. And in this nation that has drifted from you, Lord, we repent. And we ask that you would give to us a spirit of repentance, that we would turn back to you, knowing that as we cry out to you, Lord, as we turn from our sin, as we call upon the name of the Lord, you have promised that you will heal our land, that you will hear our prayer.

And for the whole world, Lord, we think of places where the gospel message is prohibited, where the name of Jesus cannot be spoken. And yet we thank you that you can penetrate these places. And so we ask, Lord, for countries where there are regimes that are hostile to the gospel, that you would break through and that you would use your people to bring that message and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Bless those in your church in persecuted lands. Give them fortitude. Give them courage. Give them protection. And enable them, we pray.

And enable us, we pray, to know the encouragement of your spirit as we seek to worship you. So hear our prayers and guide us in this time of worship, for we pray these things in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake.

[10 : 35] Amen. Boys and girls, good to see you. Or not good to not see you, but to know that you're there. I've got something special for you this week.

Do you remember last week when we watched that video clip of the assault course, the guy that threw the ball and it went all over the place and eventually it went through the basket? Well, this week I've got Harris' version of that and it stars two very important people, Michael and John McLean.

Play the tape. Hurry, hurry, please. Come on. Yes! Thank you, John McLean. Thank you, John McLean and Michael for that video. It was very impressive, wasn't it? We saw the train, Michael with the train controls and the train chugged off and it hit the domino, that hit the domino, that hit the domino and the domino.

And the domino's all fell down and then it knocked the ball and the ball went across and it went down the slide or the Hoover attachment or whatever it was and it went onto the floor, shooting across the floor, touched John McLean's foot and that was the trigger for John McLean.

John McLean to do what we know John McLean would always do and that was launch the ball into the top corner and score.

[12:02] So, impressive video, impressive course and I wonder if you can remember what the point of the video last week was.

We saw all this stuff going around but what was it supposed to remind us of? Well, it was supposed to remind us of how God works. God works and sometimes he just asks us to do one little thing. Sometimes it's almost like we're just one domino and he asks us to do one little thing and we give a push and although we don't see what God's doing down the line, he's got all these other things worked out.

And so, he uses a little word that you might say to somebody in the playground about Jesus and that gets them thinking. And then they might pick up a book that somebody's given and God has asked them to give this person the book and they learn a bit more about Jesus.

And they might go to a club and they hear more about Jesus and then somebody else is kind to them and they realize that that person trusted Jesus. And God uses all these little things, all these people to do his work.

[13:12] And so, his plans are much bigger sometimes than we see and than we can even think. So, we see God's plans or there's a picture of God's plans in that video that Jono and Michael did for us.

But there's another video. So, play the tape again. Hey! How are you? How are you? How are you? How are you? How are you? What did you think of that video? That's a video that looked a lot like the first one when it began.

We saw Michael again with the controls and the train started chugging along and knocked into the dominoes and it knocked over one domino and the next one and the next one and the next one. We expected it to carry on going but then everything stopped. What was the problem? Well, the problem was that there was a big slate or a stone or something like that and it was in the middle of the course.

And so, the dominoes went only so far but then there was a block and they couldn't go any further. And so, because the dominoes didn't fall, the ball didn't roll. Because the ball didn't roll, Jono couldn't kick.

[14:32] And because Jono didn't kick, there was no goal. So, everything stopped. And why did I ask Jono and Michael to do that video? Well, I asked them to do that video because that gives us another picture of sometimes what can happen in our lives that's a problem.

What's the biggest problem that we have? Well, I know if you were here in the room, you would tell me the biggest problem that we have is sin. And sin, it acts like a block in our lives.

Just like we saw that stone blocking the assault course, sin is like a block in our lives. And it stops us from being able to be God's friends and it stops us from doing God's work.

It's a big problem. So, what do we do? Well, what would Michael and Jono need to do to make that assault course work again? Well, they'd have to take that stone out.

And they'd have to line the dominoes back up. And then everything would move freely again. So, how can we have our sin, that block, taken out of our hearts so that we can be God's friends and so that we can be useful and do God's work when he asks us to?

[15:51] How do we get rid of our sin? Well, you know the answer to that question, don't you? The answer to that question is Jesus.

He came to this world and he went to our cross to take our sin away. And he promises that he'll take our sin away when we ask him.

And then we can be God's friends. And we can be those who get on with doing God's work. 1 John 1.9. Just so you know that this is God's word and not mine.

It says if we confess our sins, we tell God about our sins, if we admit our sins, he is faithful and just. And he will forgive us our sins.

And so that's good news. And we'll pray now. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you came to this world to be the savior of sinners.

[16:52] And we thank you that when we ask you, you promise that you will take the sin out of our lives, out of our hearts. We know sin blocks us from being able to know you.

We know that sin sometimes comes into our hearts when we do know you, but it stops us from being able to do your work. And it makes us feel sick in our hearts. And we pray that you would take that sin away from each of our hearts.

And we ask that all the boys and girls and everyone who's watching and listening in, we pray that we would be God's friends, that we would be Christians. And we pray that you would use us to do your work in this world.

And we pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Thank you, boys and girls, for listening. Thank you again, Jono and Michael. And I think James and Marian probably were involved too in that video.

So thank you for doing that for us this week. We're going to turn now to God's word as the boys and girls go to Sunday school. And we're going to read from Romans chapter 11.

[18:00] Romans chapter 11. And we'll read from verse one. This is God's word. I ask then, did God reject his people? Paul is speaking here about the Jews.

He was a Jew himself. And he asks, did God reject his people? By no means. I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin.

God did not reject his people whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the scripture says in the passage about Elijah? How he appealed to God against Israel. Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars.

I am the only one left and they are trying to kill me. And what was God's answer to him? I have reserved for myself 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

So too, at the present time, there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works. If it were, grace would no longer be grace. What then?

[19:06] What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened as it is written. God gave them a spirit of stupor. Eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear to this very day.

And David says, may their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see and their backs be bent forever.

Again, I ask, did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all. Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

But if their transgression means riches for the world and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring?

I'm talking to you Gentiles. And as much as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.

[20:12] For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy.

If the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off on you, though a wild olive shoot have been grafted in amongst the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches.

If you do, consider this. You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in. Granted, but they were broken off because of unbelief.

And you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

Consider, therefore, the kindness and sternness of God. Sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his right and his kindness.

[21 : 20] Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature and contrary to nature, were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited. Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written, the deliverer will come from Zion. He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins. As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account. But as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs. For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you, who are at one time disobedient to God, have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient, in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you.

[22 : 47] For God has bound all men over to disobedience, so that he may have mercy on them all. O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen. And may God bless that being of his word to us.

Let's pray as we come back to this passage. Lord, we thank you for this letter that we have in our hands, this letter that first was heard amongst the Romans, sent by the Apostle Paul.

We thank you that the relevance it had for them on that day is a relevance that still comes to us on this day. And so we pray that just as you spoke to them through the Apostle Paul then, that you would speak to us today.

[23 : 58] Give us insight, give us understanding. May our hearts not be hardened, may our eyes not be shut and our ears blocked, but we pray that you would work to open us to the message of the gospel and give us faith to respond.

So hear our prayers. Help us, Lord, in this time. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. We all know what it's like to be snubbed sometimes.

Perhaps you're driving in the car and you wave at somebody and they look away. Or you extend your hand for a handshake and the person turns away from you.

Now that may be something that happens to us by an individual. They may do it to us once or twice or perhaps even three times. And we feel the sting of it.

But what comes next? Well, we stop putting our hand out for a handshake, don't we? If somebody blanks us four times in the car deliberately, we'll just stop waving.

[25 : 07] That's what tends to happen in our experience. Now, at the end of Romans 10, that's the picture of God towards Israel.

His arms are outstretched. His hand is outstretched towards them. Romans 10 verse 21, if you glance back at the last chapter concerning Israel, he says, All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.

God is calling them in the gospel to come to him. But they still did not come. They persistently do not come to him. So what next? That's the question that Paul really picks up on in Romans chapter 11.

What would God now do with Israel? In light of their persistent rebellion and rejection of Christ, what would God do with them?

Would he reject them now once and for all? It's a question that Paul asks. And then he answers it very quickly and with a resounding and joyful no.

[26 : 15] That's not what God will do. I ask then, verse 1 of chapter 11, did God reject his people? By no means, says Paul. And that takes us to the first point.

We see here the great patience of God. Now, how does Paul teach us about the great patience of God? Well, he teaches us by simply looking in the mirror.

Paul looks in the mirror and he sees that he himself has not been rejected by God. And he is an Israelite. Verse 1, he says, I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin.

And then as Paul thought back over his life for many years, as we know and as we see in the book of Acts, Paul was an Israelite who stubbornly resisted God.

He can think back to how furiously he opposed Jesus and how zealously he opposed the followers of Christ.

[27 : 23] He thinks about how deserving he was of God's rejection. And yet, says the apostle Paul, God did not reject me.

But rather, God was patient with him. And if you look in the mirror, and if I look in the mirror, and if we think back over our lives as Paul likely thought back over his life, we don't have to think long to come up with many reasons that God could give to reject us.

There is much sin in our history, in our lives as we look back. There is many reasons that we have given God to punish us, but he has shown us great patience.

And that should stir something within us. It should stir two things within us. As we think about the great patience of God, it should stir us to be hopeful.

If God can save Paul, if he can take hold of Paul, who was so consumed with hate for Jesus and for Christians, if God could save Paul, if God can save you and I, when we think about our dark hearts, he can save anyone.

[28 : 57] And that should make us hopeful. For everyone. James Montgomery Boyce says, You may be laboring under the thought that you are a hopeless case because of who you are, or because of something you have said or thought.

Or you may have a family member whose case seems hopeless. I assure you, says Boyce, on the basis of the word of God, that the case is not hopeless, and you are not hopeless either.

Only unbelief keeps a person from salvation. And even today, you may still call on the name of the Lord and be wonderfully saved.

As we consider the great patience of God, we should be full of hope. And that's a hope that should move us to pray for people and to reach out to people with the gospel, believing, as we often sing, that the vilest defender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus, a pardon receives.

Think about John Newton. John Newton was a slave trader. He was the most notorious blasphemer.

[30 : 22] And yet he was taken hold of by God. God sought him. God saved him. He wrote the hymn, Amazing Grace, How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

And John Newton was known to have said, I have never despaired of any man since God saved me.

The great patience of God. It should stir us to hope and it should stir us to praise God. I watched that documentary last week.

It was a Louis Theroux documentary where he spent time with children who had severe autism and he spent time also with their parents.

And, you know, it was a very moving documentary. And Theroux, as he took it to a conclusion, he said that he was in awe. He was just overwhelmed with how much love and patience these parents had for their children.

[31 : 32] And it was a moving and it was a fitting way to bring the documentary to a conclusion. But for us, when we think about ourselves, when we think about how we are towards God, how patient God has been with us, how loving he is towards us and towards all his children, when we consider that, it should move us to praise him.

You know, as we'll do at the end of the service, we should sing with great vigor, I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus, the Nazarene, who, and wonder how he could love me, a sinner condemned unclean.

How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song will ever be, how marvelous, how wonderful is my Savior's love for me. And it's a love that we see so powerfully as we consider the great patience of God towards his people, towards us.

So the great patience of God is the first point. The second point we come to here is the gracious foreknowledge of God. The gracious foreknowledge of God.

And remember, as a wee boy, I used to go out in the summer holidays especially, I would go out fishing with my Shiner Archie. And to be honest, I didn't do much fishing.

[33 : 15] I spent most of my time on the shore in a tango. All this line would be wrapped around the bubble and the hook and the tip of the fishing rod and I would try and untangle it.

But the more I tried to untangle it, the worse things got. God. Now, God's grace and God's foreknowledge are two attributes of God that we see very clearly in the Bible. We could go various places and see them and sometimes we try to look at these two things singularly. Sometimes we try to even separate one from the other but the more we try and separate God's grace and God's foreknowledge, the bigger a tangle we get into in our minds. And from verses two to verse ten of this chapter we see both God's grace and his foreknowledge of his people woven together in a way that's more mysterious than we can understand. To verse two, God did not reject his people whom he foreknew. Now, even if we pause there for a second, that statement alone should give us great encouragement if we're Christians. [34 : 42] God did not reject his people whom he foreknew. You know, if our wives or husbands knew exactly what we would be like after twenty years of marriage before entering into marriage, if they foreknew us thirty years on, they might never have said on the wedding day, I do. And what we learn in verse two is that even though God foreknew exactly what we would be like as his people, even though he foreknew that you and I would fall and fail and deny him, he still called us. And he didn't and he doesn't and he will not reject us. Just as he did not reject Israel, even though they were so unfaithful. Still in verse two, don't you know what the scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he appealed to God against Israel? Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars. I am the only one left and they're trying to kill me. That's Elijah's appeal. And then we have God's answer in verse four. And what was God's answer to him? [36 : 05] I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. So what we see here as Paul develops his argument is that in Elijah's day, God did not reject Israel. He chose from within Israel a people for himself, who did not bow the knee, verse 4, to Baal. And we might be tempted to ask, well, is that why God chose them? Did he choose them because they didn't bow the knee to Baal and God foreknew that they wouldn't bow the knee to Baal? did he choose them on the basis of his foreknowledge of their future good works? You know, we tend to think that way. We're very quick to think that God chooses us on the basis of some good thing in us. But that's not the case. God chose a people in Elijah's day. God chose a people in Paul's day. God chooses a people in our day because of his grace. [37 : 15] Verse 5, so too, says Paul, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer works, if it were, grace would no longer be grace. And Paul drives this home, repeatedly, in this letter. And as he drives home this doctrine of grace, we're taking back once more to the cross, that place that we must never drift from. Grace is, as I've so often said, think about it, G-R-A-C-E, God's righteousness, or God's righteousness, in connection with the book of Romans, God's righteousness at Christ's expense. And Christ was expended. Christ completed the work of our salvation at the cross. So when we turn away from the cross, as Israel did, and try to strike a salvation deal with God on the basis of our shabby, filthy, good works, it's an insult to Jesus. We're chosen by grace, God's grace, says Paul. What then, verse 7, what Israel sought so earnestly, it did not obtain, but the elected. [38 : 47] The others were hardened, as it is written. God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see, and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day. And David says, may their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block, and retribution for them, may their eyes be darkened, so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever. Paul goes back into the Old Testament, he's in Isaiah 29 there, and Deuteronomy 29, and Psalm 69. And he's showing here that although some are chosen because of God's grace, there are others whose hearts are hardened, and they can't see, and they can't hear. And the question I think that flows from this is, why are some chosen by grace, and others not? And the answer to that question is, I don't know. We don't know. As we often sing, I know not why God's wondrous grace to me he hath made known, nor why unworthy as I am, he claim me for his own.

But I know him I have believed, and I'm persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed unto him against that day.

[40 : 24] the person whose heart is hardened, as we read of in verse 7, the person who has that spirit of stupor, verse 8, will not see Jesus and their need of him.

And they likely will not hear any of this if they've tuned in, and more likely than not, such people will not have tuned in. But I think the message and application here is, if you're hearing this, if Paul's gospel is coming to you, you have opportunity still to believe and to receive that grace.

Remember the Philippian jailer in Acts chapter 16? In that moment of opportunity that crashed into his life as this earthquake threw all the prison gates open and the prisoners strewn out of the prison. In that moment of opportunity he meets Paul and he cries out, what must I do to be saved? And what did Paul say in response?

Well, did he say, well, sit down, let me just tell you about God's election and foreknowledge of his people. Let's just work through the doctrinal points of this.

[41 : 48] No, Paul didn't say any of that. even though that's true. What he said was believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

And as that Philippian jailer took hold of the grace of Jesus, it became clear that he was one of God's chosen people. And your job and mine is not to try and figure out who is chosen and who is not.

Rather, it's to believe in Jesus if we can see him. It's to respond to his voice if we can hear him. And once we have believed, our job is to share him with everyone, with anyone who will listen.

God's love. So there we see the gracious foreknowledge of God. The third point here is we see the gospel progress of God.

For a while here in Tarbert, it was very quiet during lockdown. The R.J. McLeod workers and the other contractors were off the island and the machinery was parked up.

[43 : 08] The boats were away from the harbour because of the restrictions that COVID-19 brought in. The work of renovating the harbour in Tarbert, it stopped.

There was no progress. And what we see in verses 11 to verse 24 is that God's gospel work, it never stops.

And I am not going to read all the verses from 11 to 24 again, but you can scan through them with me just for a moment as I try and just get the gist of it.

What we see in these verses is that although the gospel went first to Israel, most of Israel didn't believe. Now, did that mean that God's work to save a people for himself ground to a halt?

No, it didn't. Still, God was working amongst a few of the Jews and Paul himself was evidence of that. but now says Paul, verse 11, salvation has come to the Gentiles.

[44 : 13] Now, that's us. People like us were hearing about Jesus all over the world and they were believing. And that brought great joy to the apostle Paul who was God's apostle to the Gentiles, verse 13.

But still, the apostle Paul longed for his own people that they would come to know Jesus for themselves, verse 14 and following. And in verse 17 to 21, Paul is saying to the believing Gentile, to the Christian in Rome as they read this letter, don't look down on the Jew with an arrogant, critical spirit.

He's saying rather join with me in praying for them and reaching out to them. And in verse 22 to 24, Paul directs us to look again to the Lord who is stern and who cuts off those who reject him, those who do not believe in Jesus, and yet he was kind and grafts into his people those who have faith in Jesus.

So that's a very quick sprint through these verses 11 to 24. And the main point that I want to draw out of that section is to see that God is always working.

In terms of the salvation plan of God, he never stops. He's always working.

[45 : 54] And the question I think that comes to us in respect of this is where are we in relation to that work? remember Jesus when he was in his own home town?

Mark chapter 6 verses 5 and 6 says that he could not do any miracles there except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.

It says that Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith. So what did he do? Well, he moved on. And in a sense, as Israel transgressed, as it says in verse 11 and 12, and determined not to believe the gospel, God moved on.

He moved on from them to work amongst the Gentiles. And he used Paul to do that. And yet, for Paul, it was painful for him to see. It was painful for him to see God move on from his own fellow countrymen to those who were the Gentiles.

And actually, this is something also that's painful for us to see. In days gone by, this country, Scotland, the United Kingdom, was a country where God was at work in great revival power.

[47 : 21] But we have transgressed as Israel did. We have rejected Jesus as Israel did. And so God moved on.

And today, the reality is we see bits and pieces, but we see very little salvation in this land. We hear of very few conversions.

This is a spiritual backwater. empire. But if we look to China, and if we look to Iran, and if we look to Afghanistan, and if we look to Nepal, these are places where it's hard to be a Christian.

We can read accounts of how people are being saved in great numbers. We can see in the south, we can see in the east, that God is still at work in great power.

And that should cause us to praise him as we see all that he is doing around the world. And yet, that I think is something that should cause us to cry out to him.

[48 : 35] As we see the spiritual sickness of our own nation. 2 Chronicles verse 7 verses 13 to 15.

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land, or send a plague among my people, if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven.

And I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

Will we pray for Scotland? Will we pray for the United Kingdom? Israel? And will you pray for Israel?

Says Paul. That takes us on to the fourth point. We see the pursuit of God. It's an amazing thing to see here, but as this chapter comes towards a close, what we see is that God is still pursuing Israel.

[50 : 03] Israel. And it's because God is still pursuing Israel that Paul still longs to see them saved. Verse 25.

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited. Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

And so all Israel will be saved. As it is written, the deliverer will come from Zion. He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.

It says in the NIV heading, you might be using the same Bible, all Israel will be saved. Verse 26. And so all Israel will be saved.

Now is that true? Well, it's not true in a geographical sense as we know it. This does not mean that everyone who has an Israeli passport will be saved.

[51 : 13] That's not what Paul is saying here. But I think, and I know this is an area of great debate, so you have to do your own thinking on this.

I think that this may mean that there's a time coming when many more Jews will be saved and have been saved and are being saved presently.

Kofi says, the statement that all Israel will be saved must indicate a large number of Jews. But in the context of all that Paul has said in this letter, their salvation must be through faith in Jesus Christ.

And John Stott as well, if you read John Stott, he's also of that view that there will be a great number of Jews saved who will look to Jesus in these last days.

Verse 28, as far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account, but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

[52 : 24] Just as you who are at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you.

For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. And in these verses again I think Paul is looking at his fellow countrymen, the Jews, and he admits readily, he says yes on account of their unbelief, their enemies of God just now.

But only a few minutes ago when Romans chapter 5 and verse 10 was read to that fellowship of believers in Rome, remember they weren't going through a chapter a week, the whole letter would be read out, so just a few minutes ago they heard Paul say in Romans chapter 5 verse 10, when we

were God's enemies we were reconciled to him through the death of his son.

And so says Paul, that death that reconciled us is still able to reconcile all who will believe, Gentile and Jew.

Weerspey says, though the Jews may seem like enemies of God's will today, they are still beloved in God's sight.

[53 : 54] And so we should pray for them. God has not given up on them, he is still pursuing them, he is pursuing Jews, he is pursuing non-Jews, he is pursuing people and nations all across this world, so we should pray into that gospel pursuit.

The intensity of God's pursuit of his people is breathtaking. Sometimes we ask someone to come to church or we begin to share the gospel with someone and we ask them once and they say no or they shut us down.

We might ask a second time and again they snub us, so what do we do? Well, we give up. No more pursuing, it's too awkward. God is not like that.

His pursuit of his people is relentless. it's intense. For our salvation, God the Son came from heaven to earth.

He went all the way down to a cross to deal with our sin. And even though like Israel, many today, maybe even some who are watching today, continue to reject God so repeatedly and so coldly, if you are still listening, if you have ears to hear, if you have eyes to see Jesus and you're in need of him, God is still pursuing you.

[55 : 34] And there is opportunity right now to be saved. So how do we end this chapter?

there's only one appropriate ending to this chapter and it's praise. Finally, here we see, we overhear Paul engaging in praising God.

You see the praise of God. O the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, verse 33.

How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out. Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?

Who has ever given to God that we, that God should repay him. For from him and through him and to him are all things.

[56 : 42] To him be the glory forever. Amen. What do we see here in Paul's song of praise?

Let me just give you the headings and we'll conclude. We see here that God's wisdom, verse 33 and 34, God's wisdom is more than we can understand.

And that much has been made clear through the past few chapters. God's wisdom, his ways, his attributes, his salvation plan. He shares something of it with us, but it's higher than we can understand.

It's greater than we can grasp. that should move us to praise him. And we see here secondly that God's mercy and his grace is more than we deserve.

Verse 35, who's ever given to God that God should repay him? God owes us nothing. We deserve nothing but his wrath for our sin.

[57 : 57] sin. But in Christ he has given us everything. He's given us forgiveness of sin. He's given us eternal life.

He's given us himself. And that should move us to praise him. And we see finally here God's praise is our eternal purpose.

verse 36, for from him and through him and to him are all things to him be the glory forever.

Amen. But as man's chief end, man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

and when we delve into this gospel as Paul encourages us to, when we see who God is, when we see all that God has done for us in Christ, what can we do?

[59 : 00] What must we do? We must praise him. It's our duty, it's our joy, now and forever, to praise the Lord.

Amen. We'll conclude by praising the Lord, by saying that great hymn, I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene.

I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene, and wonder how he could love me, a sinner condemned unclean.

How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be. How marvelous, how wonderful, how wonderful, is my Savior's love for me.

for me, for me, it was in the garden, he prayed, not my will but thine, he had no tears for his own griefs, but sweet drops, blood for mine.

[60 : 22] How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be. How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Savior's love for me.

In pity, angels beheld him, and came from the world of light, to comfort him in the sorrows he bore for my soul that night.

How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be. How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Savior's love for me.

He took my sins and my sorrows, he made them his very own. He bore the burden to count free, and suffered and died alone.

How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be. How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Savior's love for me.

[61 : 38] When with the ranselting glory his face I at last shall see, it will be my joy through the ages to sing of his love for me.

How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be. How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Savior's love for me.

Is my Savior's love for me. Is my Savior's love for me. And I may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forevermore.

Amen.