



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 11: 25-32

Romans

“Jews for Jesus”

TRANSCRIPT

What we come to is the last portion of Paul’s argument of this portion of Romans, Romans chapters 9, 10, and 11. It’s not the end of the chapter – that concludes with verses 33 through 36, which we will consider next week, which is Paul’s doxology, what all of this moves Paul to do, which is to praise God and glorify him. But we come to the end of Paul’s argument in Romans 9, 10, and 11, about the faithfulness of God, the reliability of his Word.

People looked at the Jew, considered the promises that had been made to Israel, but considered the fact that Jewish people were largely in unbelief, it appeared that one could say God’s Word had failed, God’s promises had failed, and so Paul has been explaining how that’s not the case at all. God’s Word has not failed, and he comes to the conclusion of that argument in verses 25 through 32.

“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery -so that you will not be wise in your own estimation -that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;

and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB."

"THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."

From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers;

for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience,

so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy.

For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.”

This is a rather complicated argument, as the last portion, the portion we studied last week, is; and so if you are interested in studying more about this section of Romans – in fact, studying chapters 9 through 11 – then I would recommend to you reading Dr. Johnson’s booklet, “Romans 9 to 11 and the Millennial Controversy,” in which he deals in much more detail the subject that we will cover this morning. I think it’ll be very helpful to you, as well as the tapes that he has done on this text.

But we’ll pray that the Lord makes this time together beneficial for all of us, so let’s bow before him.

Father, we do pray that you would bless us and make our time together beneficial as we look into this great text of Scripture, which reminds us of your mercy. Mercy which you have extended to the Gentiles – people who are unworthy – but we, by your grace, were grafted in to the olive tree, which was not our tree. We’re the unnatural branches; contrary to nature we were placed in that great tree of blessing.

And others were broken off, and yet your promise of mercy is extended to Israel, and that will someday happen, and all Israel will be saved. It is a great testimony to your faithfulness, your faithfulness to your Word, and your great mercy. So Father, teach us these things, and help us to appreciate them more deeply. We look to you to bless us in this way.

To teach us, to build us up in the faith, to equip us through our time together to live lives that are orderly, that are honorable, that are pleasing to you, and are helpful to others. Help us to live consistent Christian lives, for our own sakes, for the sakes of our family and the world around us; may we be a good witness to those who see us, Father, and may they hear the truth of the gospel from us—the promise of salvation to sinners who simply believe in Jesus Christ.

What a simple but exceedingly profound and blessed message that is. Use us, Father, that we might be a blessing to others. And so equip us, build us up in the faith to that end. Bless us spiritually. Draw us closer to yourself through our time together. Help us to appreciate all that we have in Christ; appreciate your mercy. Bless us spiritually, but Father, we pray that you'd also bless us physically in the material things of life.

We pray for those who are experiencing difficulty, those who have gone through surgery, those who are facing surgery – bless them. We pray for friends of those who are members of the chapel, family members. You know them, you know their condition far better than we do, far better than the doctors do. Bless – in the midst of affliction, give blessing, spiritual blessing, encouragement. Draw your people close to yourself.

Father, we often grow most in hard times, in times of affliction, but we should grow in times of ease and comfort as well. And as we experience that, may we not forget that it comes from your hand. That the pleasant experiences of life are from you, and are times to refresh ourselves, times to be active in your service. Help us to do that. Help us to use our time well. So bless us to that end this morning, and sanctify us.

Build us up in the faith. We pray for our nation, that you'd bless it. Bless our leaders in this time of crisis. We live in a chaotic world. We live in a fallen world that is filled with evil, and so Father, we pray for protection from that. We pray that you'd keep our government officials safe and give them wisdom, that they might govern our land wisely and well, and that you bless our armed forces abroad, that you'd protect them and give them success.

We pray mostly, Father, though, that you would bless our land with revival. Open the hearts of men and women to understand the gospel, to long for the life that you offer, and the forgiveness of sin, and use us in your service to that end. We pray for our service tonight, that it would be pleasing to you; that you would prepare our hearts for that even now. And that you'd prepare our hearts with our final hymn for a time of study and worship together. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

When Oliver Cromwell ruled England, he was visited by a Jewish scholar from Amsterdam named Manasseh ben Israel, who came to speak to him on behalf of

the Jews of Europe, who were being persecuted. It was a rare sight in London, because hundreds of years earlier, in the 13th century, all the Jews had been expelled from England. But Manasseh came to ask if they might be allowed to return for refuge.

Cromwell was sympathetic, and during his time as Lord Protector, England's doors were again open to the Jewish people. One reason for Cromwell's decision was his belief, as he said, “There is a promise in Holy Scripture of the conversion of the Jews,” and he believed that they would hear the gospel in Puritan England. Cromwell was right. The Bible does promise the conversion of the Jews. We find that promise in Romans 11, which prophesies a rebirth for Israel.

The theme of this chapter is stated in verse 2: “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” God has not cast off his chosen people, Israel. Today the Jewish people are largely in unbelief. They are spiritually blind, spiritually dead, but God is not finished with them. Paul proves that, first in verses 1 through 10 of chapter 11, by showing that God's rejection of Israel is only partial. There is still a believing remnant. Paul himself is an example of that, as he said.

The early church was a Jewish church – it is an example of that. And it shows that God is still dealing with the nation. Then in verses 11 through 24, he shows that God's rejection of Israel is only temporary. It's not final. And Paul illustrated that with the parable of the olive tree. The olive tree represents the place of blessing with the people of God, its root being Abraham and the unconditional promises that God made to him, and to Isaac and Jacob.

Israel, though, is like branches that have been broken off because of their unbelief, while the Gentile believers are like wild branches that have been grafted into the tree. But that is not the end. There is a future for the Jewish people. Paul says God is able to graft them in again. Nothing is too difficult for God. Their salvation is possible. In fact, since God saved wild Gentiles, who do not belong to the olive tree, it is not only possible for him to save Jews; it is probable that he will.

“How much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree,” verse 24. Now in verses 25 through 32, Paul goes a step further. It is not only possible; it is not only probable, it is certain. Verse 26: “All Israel will be saved.” And when that happens, it will mean great blessing for the whole world.

What Paul called “life from the dead” in verse 15. That is the glorious goal of history. History is not circular. It’s not moving in a circle, going nowhere.

History is linear. History is going in a direct line toward a goal, toward a finish, toward a glorious conclusion, and that’s what Paul is teaching. The German philosopher Hegel could not understand the Jew and his place in history. He said it was an enigma. Paul calls it a mystery, but he understood it, and he believed that it was very important for the church to understand it, and that’s the reason he explains it.

Verse 25: “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” Paul often speaks of mysteries. He uses that word a lot – something like 20 or 21 times. He uses it of the church, he uses it of godliness and lawlessness, and here he uses it of Israel.

Now, a mystery is not a secret, like the mystics of a club or a fraternal order. A mystery in the New Testament is something that could not be known by men except by revelation. It is a truth that was hidden in the past from God’s people, but has been revealed in the present. The mystery here is about Israel’s future, and Paul reveals it in three parts. First, a partial hardening has happened to Israel. Second, it will last until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

And the third part is given in verse 26: “All Israel will be saved.” So it is given in three successive stages of fulfillment. This is the order in which God’s plan for the future of Israel will unfold, and we can say God’s plan for the future of the world will unfold. The first is a present reality, and it’s something that Paul has already revealed: the hardening of Israel is only partial. It is not complete. There is a remnant of believers today.

There is a remnant of Jewish believers in every generation, which indicates that God is not completely cast off his people. He has not forsaken Israel. He still has a plan for it. He’s still dealing with his people. But while there is a remnant, and the hardening is only partial, it does involve the majority of the nation. Because of unbelief, most of the branches have been broken off of the olive tree. It is a judicial hardening. It was a judicial breaking off.

God has given the nation over to its unbelief, over to the stubbornness of its heart, so that the people are now spiritually blind; they are spiritually insensitive.

They are hardened to the truth. They have the Word of God, and they could read the Word of God, but a veil, Paul says in 2 Corinthians, is over their eyes as they read the Law of Moses. They do not understand it. They have been hardened. Well, that is the present condition, but it is not permanent.

It will continue, Paul says, “until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in” – that is, until God finishes grafting in the Gentiles to the olive tree. While Israel is in a hardened condition, Gentiles will continue to be brought to salvation, and so it will go until their fullness is reached. That’s an interesting statement, “the fullness of the Gentile,” and what it seems to mean, very clearly, is the full number of Gentiles. Until they are saved, this will continue.

So God has determined to save a certain number of Gentiles, and only when that number is reached, only when that number is filled up, will Israel’s hardening be removed. That will bring about the third stage of God’s plan, when Paul says in verse 26, “All Israel will be saved.” This sequence of events, this unfolding of history, is what Paul wanted the Gentiles to understand. This is the mystery that he is revealing to them.

And he wants them to understand that because the knowledge of this mystery is the solution to conceit, the solution to pride. That, at least in part, is the reason that Paul felt it so important to make this known, “so that you will not be wise in your own estimation.” So this doctrine of Israel’s future is very practical. Pure doctrine always is practical. Paul proves that in other places. It’s very interesting to see how Paul the apostle uses doctrine to correct and to teach practical living.

In Philippians chapter 2 we have a great example of that, verses 6 through 11; Paul gives what may be the most significant Christological passage in the Bible. It’s the passage about Christ emptying himself. In fact, we just sang about that with Wesley’s hymn; “Emptied himself,” he said, “of all but love.” Well, it’s about Christ emptying himself.

And Paul explains this, gives a very deep, significant theological passage of Scripture, for the purpose of explaining humility and solving a problem of disharmony in the church; so doctrine, the knowledge of God, is very important for practical living. John Stott is correct when he writes: “The complete antidote to pride is truth.” I think that’s right. I think that’s very correct. Paul, as you know, says in 1 Corinthians 8:1 that knowledge puffs up.

So one might say, “Does not that contradict what you’re saying?” Well, Paul doesn’t mean by that that knowledge is bad, or that doctrine is dangerous. Rightly understood, doctrine sanctifies, and so it is the complete antidote to pride in truth. Charles Bridges, who was a 19th century Anglican churchman who wrote a number of influential books that are still read today – some of you are probably familiar with his book on the Proverbs, an excellent treatment of that subject and that portion of Scripture.

Well, in one of his books he made the observation that “It is indeed too rare to find a real Christian; much more rare to find a joyful one.” And then he added, “He is gloomy not because he has too much religion, but too little.” And I think we can change that without violating the quotation at all, in fact, coming to the meaning of it, by saying, “He is gloomy not because he has too much truth, but too little” – not enough doctrine.

If you want to be a joyful Christian – and you should be a joyful Christian – if you want to be a humble Christian, not a proud Christian, what you need is what I need, and that’s a deeper knowledge of the Word of God and the whole counsel of God. Truth is the antidote to pride, and to a joyless life. Well, Paul knew that the Romans needed more knowledge about Israel’s future in order to understand their own place in God’s plan of salvation, his plan for the world, in order to prevent them from becoming proud.

They looked at themselves – the church was becoming predominately Gentile toward the middle and latter part of the first century. The Jewish element was beginning to decrease, and they began to think of themselves as God’s favorite people; that they had priority over the Jewish people, and began to take pride in themselves. And when that happens – when pride sets in – then the grace of God begins to be diminished, and people fall away. Apostasy occurs.

So Paul is seeking to prevent that, and does so by giving these people a clear perspective and understanding of how they fit into God’s plan, and where the Jewish people fit into that plan. The fact is Gentile believers have been graciously grafted in to Jewish blessings, and in the future, the Jewish people as a whole will be reborn to inherit those blessings. God has a plan for his people; the people whom Zechariah called “the apple of his eye.”

And our future, as Gentile believers, our future blessing, depends on their future blessing, so we have no grounds for boasting. We have no grounds for conceit, or being puffed up about our position with the Lord. The stages of God’s plan are unfolding, so that all Israel will be saved. Now, of course, not everyone understands history, or explains this text in that way. There are different interpretations of the expression “all Israel.”

John Calvin, for example, interpreted “all Israel” to mean the church, Jews and Gentiles together, so that we are now spiritual Israel. The problem with that interpretation is it’s inconsistent with the meaning of the word “Israel” used in verse 25, in the previous verse, which is clearly ethnic Israel. It is clearly the nation Israel that Paul is speaking of. In fact, all through the book of Romans, Paul uses the word “Israel” of ethnic Israel, of national Israel, in contrast to the Gentiles.

So that idea doesn’t hold up exegetically. Another explanation which has some popularity today is that “all Israel” refers to the total number of elect Jews, the remnant of Jews within the nation Israel, that are being saved during the present age, and nothing more. According to this view, Paul’s statement in verse 25 that Israel’s hardening will continue “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” doesn’t mean that at the end of that period of time the hardening will be removed.

It means that their hardening will continue right up to the last day; it is permanent. There’s no future for the nation Israel, only for the remnant within Israel. That is the meaning of Paul’s concluding statement in verse 26, “and so all Israel will be saved.” With that interpretation, the word “so” refers back to all that Paul has written on this subject, and means “in this way,” with the idea “all Israel will be saved” in this way, or in the manner previously described, by a remnant being saved in the present age.

So “all Israel” is to be defined as that remnant, those few Jewish believers in every generation that are saved, and we come to the end, that’s all Israel. But again, there are problems. First, the word “until,” used in verse 25, normally refers to a period of time that will come to an end and be followed by a change. For example, we often read 1 Corinthians 11:26 at the evening meeting.

It applies to the Lord’s Supper, and there Paul writes that we will eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord’s Supper “until he comes.” That is followed by a change; a change in the circumstance, in which we will no longer remember the Lord

in that way. There will be a change following his coming. And here, Jewish hardening continues until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. Then a change occurs, when the hardening is removed.

Second, the text gives no support to limiting Israel’s salvation to a remnant in the present age. Throughout chapter 11:11 through 24, Paul has clearly implied that Israel will experience a day of rebirth that will far exceed anything that has been experienced by the remnant. He’s written about their fullness in contrast to their failure in verse 12, their acceptance in contrast to their rejection in verse 15, the hope of being grafted in again after having been broken off in verse 24.

All of that points to something much more than the salvation of only the elect remnant of Israel in each generation. To say that all of the elect will be saved is really stating the obvious. Paul is revealing a mystery. He’s revealing something that’s not been known before, so he’s not speaking of the elect being saved. That’s already been known – we know that. There’s no mystery in that.

And after all the hopeful statements that he has given, it is certainly what Charles Cranfield, the British commentator, describes as “an anticlimax” to say it’s only the remnant, then, that will be saved. Well, finally, the word “so” in verse 26, can refer back to what Paul has written and indicate the manner of Israel’s salvation. Many commentators understand it in that way.

But it will be by the full number of the Gentiles coming in, which will provoke Jewish jealousy and lead to Israel’s faith that this national salvation will occur. That’s what Paul means when he looks back – that in the way he has described, through the fullness of the Gentiles, the provocation of Jewish jealousy leading to faith, that then all Israel will come to the Lord and be saved.

Everything in the text indicates that when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, then a great awakening will happen among the Jewish people, and all Israel will be saved. That doesn’t mean that every Israelite or every Jew, without exception, will believe and be saved. The meaning of “all Israel” can be learned from its use in other places. It’s used frequently in the Old Testament, and it’s used in the ancient rabbinical writings. It’s used of Israel as a whole; the majority of the nation, but not every single individual.

Let me give one example. In 2 Chronicles 12:1, we read that “King Rehoboam and all Israel with him forsook the law of the Lord.” Well, that doesn’t

mean that every single Israelite forsook the law of the Lord; many did not. What it means is the majority did; most of Israel forsook the law. In the *Mishnah*, which is a collection of the traditions and writings of the ancient rabbis, there's a section in that work called *Tractate Sanhedrin*.

And in chapter 10, there is the statement, “All Israel have a share in the world to come.” Now, to read just that statement you would think every Israelite, every Jewish person, is going to have a share in the kingdom to come, but then the rabbis go on to exclude certain individuals. Three kings will not have a share in the world to come: Jeroboam, Ahab, and Manasseh. One of the rabbis disagrees, and says, “No, Manasseh will have a part in the world to come,” but then they exclude others.

And the point is “all Israel” does not mean every single Israelite, but Israel as a whole, the nation as a whole, the majority of the people, and that's Paul's meaning here. That is what history is moving toward, when there will be a great awakening within the Jewish people, and the vast majority will believe. It speaks of that great awakening at the end of the age, which Paul proves by a collection of Old Testament passages that he quotes in verses 26 and 27.

This is a combination of texts from Isaiah 59:20-21, Psalm 14:7, and Jeremiah 31:34, in which he combines them together, and those texts promise that, as he writes, “the deliverer will come from Zion.” He comes out of the heavenly Zion to Israel. It is a description of Christ and his second coming. The future tense, “will come,” gives support to that interpretation. And when he comes, we read, “He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.”

That is fundamentally the kind of deliverer that Jesus Christ is. He is a spiritual deliverer. When he came the first time, Israel was looking for a political deliverer; a conquering king, who would break the yoke of Rome and exalt Israel over the nations. He did not come to be that kind of deliverer. He came to be a spiritual deliverer; that is fundamentally what he is. All of the other blessings – and there will be political blessings.

All of the blessings, though – the resurrection to come, the kingdom to come, the eternal state that will follow – all of that is based upon this fundamental work of our Lord as the deliverer from sin. When he comes, he will deliver Israel by applying to his people the blessings of the cross – what he achieved at Calvary. Paul's

quotation continues in verse 27: “This is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” That is when the nation will turn to Christ in faith and be saved.

Other Old Testament prophecies indicate that. Zechariah chapters 12 through 14 give a prophecy about the last days. In 12:1-9, the Lord promises to deliver Jerusalem from the nations of the earth. Then in Zechariah 12:10, the Lord promises to pour out the Holy Spirit on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that “they will look on me whom they have pierced, mourn, and weep bitterly.”

The apostle John takes that text, and he applies it in Revelation 1:7 to our Lord’s second coming, when Christ comes on the clouds. And in that day they will look upon him, the tribes of the earth, and they will mourn. They will turn to him in faith; it will be a time of repentance and belief. That is when all Israel will be saved, and the reason is God’s covenant with them. This great event goes back to God’s covenant – that’s how Paul ties it in. That’s what he says in verse 27.

The covenant that he speaks of is the new covenant of Jeremiah 31, which is based on God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 and Genesis 17. It is an unconditional covenant. It speaks of what God will certainly do for Israel, and one of the main features of that covenant, as Jeremiah explains it, is the removal of sin, and the restoration of broken fellowship between God and Israel. He will restore them to himself; because God has bound himself to the Jews, he will not forsake them.

He will someday save them, and restore them to the blessings that he has promised to the patriarchs. Now, the remaining five verses give a summary of Paul’s teaching in chapters 9 through 11, and they state that Israel’s future salvation is certain for two reasons: God’s election, and God’s mercy. First, in verses 28 and 29, Paul states that God’s election of the Jewish people as a nation is permanent.

They are presently enemies, he says, because of their unbelief, but they are still beloved because of the fathers. And that reference to the fathers is a reference to the covenant that God made with Abraham, and reconfirmed with Isaac and Jacob. God made promises to bless their descendants, and he will do it. God is always faithful. He cannot go back on his word. As Paul explains in verse 29, “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

The gifts that he refers to here are the privileges that he spoke of back in 9:4-5, Israel’s adoption as sons, and the other blessings, and others besides those that are mentioned in that chapter. The calling is God’s election of the nation to a place of

blessing. Again, it doesn't mean the salvation of every member of the nation, but the salvation of the nation as a whole. That is what God promised to do, and that is irrevocable, Paul says, which literally means “is not repented of.”

God knew the kind of people that the people of Israel would be when he chose them. He knew that they would be a stiff necked people. He knew that they would go astray, and that they would do exactly the things that they have done, and become the kind of people that they have become. But the Lord is unrepentant of that choice of them. That word means “unregretted” – he has no regrets for having chosen Israel. God will not change his mind about his people, whom he has chosen.

He cannot change his mind. He cannot go back on his word. That choice is one of which is unrepented of, according to Paul. Even the false prophet Balaam knew that. He had some understanding of the living God, and in Numbers 23 he said, “God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should repent.” God is faithful to his promises, and that means that God is faithful to his people; he does not go back on the things that he has said.

Just as Paul said in 9:6, “It is not as though the Word of God has failed.” That's the great question that Paul is dealing with in these chapters: did God's word and promise to Israel fail? The nation is largely in unbelief. Paul says, “No, it has not failed.” It is yet to be fulfilled. He will restore Israel to the blessings he promised to Abraham and the nation. That is his nature; that is his character. God is immutable. He is unchanging. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And because he is faithful to Israel and the promises that he made to that people, we can be certain that he will be faithful to the church in keeping all of the promises that he has made to us. And he has made great promises to us. He has called us to eternal life. He gives us eternal life, and that means that life cannot be lost; it is eternal. That's what Jesus says. “I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

The promise of eternal life is often called “the perseverance of the saints,” which means the saints – that is, the true believers – will continue in faith to the end. That doesn't mean that Christians won't stumble, that we won't backslide – we will, we do. In fact, we do that every day. But believers in Jesus Christ will never stop being believers. Their faith will never fail.

That is behind Paul’s warning in verse 22, which we considered last week, that if we do not continue in God’s kindness we will be cut off as Israel was cut off for its unbelief. It is a way of saying what Peter says in 2 Peter 1:10 – that we are to make certain God’s calling and choosing of us. Make these things certain. Be diligent about it. And the true believer does that; the true believer will always respond to such warnings.

And warnings like this are the very means that God uses to keep us sober about our faith; to keep us earnest in our faith; to keep us believing. But ultimately, it is God’s grace that does that. He continues to constantly supply faith to his elect, so that they will never fail to believe in him, so that they will continue to continue. So really, a better name for the perseverance of the saints is the preservation of the saints, or the perseverance of God with the saints.

But what is very clear is God is faithful to his people, and keeps them secure, keeps them saved; and the Christian can rest in that truth, because God is faithful to his promises to Israel. If God was not, we would have no guarantee that he’d be faithful to us. But as Paul says, “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” So the first ground of certainty for Israel’s final salvation is God’s election. It is irrevocable.

The second ground for that confidence is given in verses 30 and 31, and that is God’s mercy, which is God’s electing love. It is unlimited, and the Gentiles are proof of that. Paul reminds the Gentiles of their own experience in verse 30, that they were once disobedient. This is a reminder of their former condition, their former lives, which Paul dealt with in some detail back in chapter 1, with their apostasy.

How they rejected the revelation of God in nature, and instead worshipped the creature rather than the creator, and went into idolatry. As a consequence, their minds became foolish and darkened, and God gave them over to their condition, gave them over to their lust. Then he gave them over to their perversion. They became haters of God, he said. But God saved Gentiles out of that lost condition. The Jewish condition is no better.

They may not be guilty of the perversions for which the Gentiles were so notorious, but they are guilty of something as bad: self-righteousness. A sense of self-confidence with God based upon their own works and their own merit. That blinds people to the reality of their lost condition. But nothing is too hard for God. If he can

save Gentiles out of their darkness and depravity, he can certainly save Jews out of their blindness and disobedience, and that is what he promises to do.

Verse 31: “so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy.” That is God’s program of salvation. Israel’s rejection of Christ worked for the blessing of the Gentiles, and in time, the blessing of the Gentiles, the salvation of the Gentiles, will work for the salvation of Israel. God will have mercy on them, just as he had mercy on the Gentiles. So Paul is restating the truth that he explained earlier in his parable of the olive tree.

But here he adds the emphasis on God’s mercy, which is God’s help for the helpless, and mercy can only be understood in the context of sin, which is here described as disobedience. It is deliverance from disobedience, and it is mercy, it is help for the helpless, because we, of ourselves, are unable to deliver ourselves from our sin, from our disobedience, from our unbelief. So this is mercy. Mercy is completely God’s doing. It is completely unmerited, undeserved.

God is not obligated to save anyone; he does it freely. Paul indicated that in 9:15-16. God said, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,” and Paul explains it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. It is his sovereign choice and his sovereign work, and the only way we can speak, possibly, of God being in any way obligated to show mercy is in the sense that God is by nature merciful, and he must act according to his nature.

It is natural for him to act according to his nature. He is a merciful God, and so it is natural for him to show mercy. But in that case, the obligation is found in himself – it’s not found in us. We are guilty. We’re disobedient, unworthy, and unable. But out of God’s goodness, out of his kindness, he has shown mercy to mankind. And in verse 32, Paul makes a final comment on God’s process of bringing mercy to mankind, to both Jews and Gentiles.

“For God has shut up all in disobedience so that he may show mercy to all.” Disobedience is like a dungeon in which humanity is held. God has ordered the world in this way. This is God’s doing, so that if people live for the world, live in disobedience to God, then they will be slaves of that disobedience. This is not simply the result of sin; this is not simply the natural consequences or outworking of sin.

God has ordered the world to be this kind of world, that if we live in rebellion against God, we will be slaves to our rebellion, and to our sin. Men, therefore, will not find peace in this world from this world. God has determined that to be so. God has shut up all in disobedience. But he has done that for a purpose, so that he can show mercy, so that people will know the reality of their condition.

So that as they deal with sin, as they see it around them and see the hopelessness of the situation, they will know that they have no possibility in themselves to escape from their disobedience, and from this evil condition, apart from God’s mercy and calling upon him. Well, mercy is God’s doing. It is his sovereign work. But we can ask for it, and he wills to have mercy on all who do. That is the purpose of the dungeon of disobedience, so that he may show mercy to all.

That is the breadth of God’s grace; that is the width of his mercy. It is to all. Now, that doesn’t mean all without exception. John Stott wrote that “on this verse some have built their universalistic dreams,” and that’s right, it is a dream. The context gives no support to universalism. The “all” to whom God will show mercy is all without distinction, not all without exception. It means both Jews and Gentiles. That is the flow of Paul’s argument in Romans 11. That is the chain of blessing.

By Israel’s rejection, God has shown mercy to the Gentiles, whose salvation is to provoke Jews to jealousy, faith, leading to salvation. And when that happens, when at the end of the age all Israel is saved, then there will be worldwide salvation – a glorious kingdom age will come. It will be a miracle of God’s grace, and that’s very clear from the description that Ezekiel the prophet gave of Israel’s future rebirth as a nation in Ezekiel 37, and his vision of the valley of dry bones.

The prophet wrote “The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones.

He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry.

He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, You know."

So the Lord told Ezekiel to prophesy over the bones, and tell them to hear the Word of the Lord. Then the Lord spoke to the bones and said, “Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life.” He did that. Ezekiel preached over

the bones, and he said, “Breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.” God told the prophet, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.” Someday that vision will be fulfilled.

Israel will be born again, and enter into the blessings that God has promised to that nation, and that will mean blessing for the whole world – life from the dead, as Paul calls it. Man cannot fix the world. The world is a chaotic place, a place filled with evil. God has shut man up to his disobedience, so man wars with one another, wars within himself. There is no peace in this world for the wicked, and man cannot change that. He cannot fix this situation, and never will fix this situation.

That will be done by the Lord God, when in the future he breathes life into dry bones. Well, that’s the future, and maybe the not-too-distant future, but what about the present? What about you? Has life been breathed into you? Have you been born again? If you’re here without Christ, if you’ve not believed in him, then your soul is like the valley of dry bones. But if God can give them life, then he can give life to you.

He has shut you up to your sin, to your disobedience, so that you will see the hopelessness of your situation and cry out to him for mercy, so do that. If you’re here without Christ, cry out to him. Realize that you’ve been shut up to your sin, and ask God for the salvation that will deliver you from that sin and from the consequences of it. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. May God help you to do that, and help all of us to rejoice in the grace that’s been given to us.

Mercy has saved us from our sins and given us a future that’s beyond comprehension. Let’s pray.

Father, we do thank you for your goodness to us; the mercy you have extended to Gentiles, the wild branches that don’t deserve to be in the place of blessing, the olive tree. But by your grace you’ve grafted us in – you’ve grafted in a multitude, a vast number, and someday you will engraft the nation itself, and it will be a glorious time. We look forward to that day. Help us to live for that day; to redeem the time that we have; it’s short.

May we use it well, to be witnesses for you and to bring glory to your name, and we pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.