



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 9: 14-23

Romans

“Let God Be God”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Romans 9:14-24 is our text. I’m not going to say anything this week about verse 24, it’ll be through verse 23, but we will read it. So if you have your text open, Romans 9:14, “What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole Earth.’

So then He has mercy on whom He desire, and he hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.” May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy, Father, you are the one who prepared both and while we come to a text such as this and recognize that we don't understand everything about it, we must come before it humbly and recognize that one thing is certainly clear, you are sovereign in this matter of salvation. And that should cause within us hearts that are thankful and humble because we recognize that all that we have is a gift from you, it is not from us. We're to praise you for that.

I pray, Father, that our time together will move our hearts to praise and to joy because you have displayed your great attribute of mercy abundantly. You have not set your love upon a very few. You have not chosen one nation, one people, but you're electing love and your effectual call has gone throughout the world. You've chosen for yourself an innumerable multitude that is like the stars of the heaven and the sand of the seashore and the dust of the earth, it can't be counted. There's so many.

Men and women from every tribe and tongue and people and nation from every age of history, a vast number of people have received mercy from you and Father, we who have believed in Jesus Christ rejoice in that and praise you and thank you for it. Because one thing Paul makes very clear in our text this morning, as the whole of the word of God does, salvation is of the Lord, it's not dependent upon us. It's not because of anything in us, it is contrary to everything in us. It's all of grace and mercy. We thank you for that. So help us, Lord, to understand these things more clearly and to rejoice in them.

May the spirit of God whom you have given to your people illuminate our mind. He is present with us here, He is in this room and I pray that He would open hearts to receive your truth and rejoice in it. Bless us spiritually but, Father, we have material needs as well and we pray you'd bless us there. We pray for the sick and the discouraged. Pray that you'd give them healing and encouragement. Pray for those that are traveling and we pray that you give them safety. We pray, Father, that you would bless our nation.

We are in a time of crisis and we pray for our leaders, that you would give them wisdom and skill as they govern this land and they prosecute a war abroad, we pray that you give them great wisdom in that and we pray that justice would be established. We pray for the protection of our military personnel and we look to you to bless in these way.

We know, Father, that we are not worthy of these things, these blessings, but we look at our land and we see on the one hand a nation filled with people indifferent towards spiritual things, a materialistic nation, a materialistic people and yet, a nation of people that have been blessed abundantly by you. We thank you for that and pray, Father, that you would bring about spiritual change in this land and cause revival to occur and if it please you, raise up us to do that, move us to do that, raise up many others.

Father, we know that you are the one who does that. We're told in our passage that Pharaoh was raised up by, sovereignly placed in the position where he was, created and established to do your will. You raised him up, you raise up the rulers of nations, you've placed them in places of authority and you raise up your people out of the spiritually dead.

You can make children of Abraham out of the rocks of the ground if you are pleased to do so. So if it pleases you, we pray that you'd use us, raise us up to be voices for you in the midst of this world, lights in the midst of a dark generation and may we be used of you to bless this people among whom we live with your truth in the gospel. We pray for ourselves this evening that you'd be bless us as we return to this place and worship our Lord and remember the mercy that you've shown to us in the cross and remember that He's coming again soon. We look forward to that day. Now bless us, Father, as we sing our final hymn, prepare our hearts for our time of worship together, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] All of us have moments in our lives that are almost as real to us today as they were 30 or 40 years ago. I can still remember a moment like that. It was late one evening in the summer of 1967, I had just graduated from high school and was for the first time really reading my bible earnestly. I was reading the Book of Romans and had just finished Romans 9, put it down and thought, well, God is great. He controls everything. He even controls the specks of dust that are falling through the air. And many have been equally impressed by this great chapter. John Piper is one. Many of you have read his books.

Some years ago he wrote a commentary on Romans 9, in the preface he stated that he had been taken captive by the picture of God that's presented here. "If there is a God," he wrote, "He must be the God of Romans 9." That's true. God is the God of Romans 9, the God of whom it is said He has mercy on whom He desires and He

hardens whom He desires. He is the potter, we are his clay. The more we study this chapter, the bigger God will become in our thinking and the smaller we will become in our own estimation.

Romans 9 is Paul’s theodicy, meaning his attempt to vindicate or justify God’s actions to men. The question he is answering in this passage, Romans 9, 10 and 11 is the question, has God’s word failed? Throughout the Old Testament there are promises to Israel of great blessing, but the reality was most Jews were in unbelief and unsaved while the gentiles, of all people, were being saved. What did that mean? Did that mean that God had broken His promises?

Paul answers that question by stating that the promises were never intended for every physical descendent of Abraham or every ethnic Jew. Not all Israel is Israel. Promises of eternal spiritual blessing were given to the elect of Israel and Paul then demonstrates that from scripture through God’s choice of Isaac over Ishmael and God’s choice of Jacob over Esau. Salvation is determined by God’s distinguishing grace in elections, not determined by natural heredity or descent. It’s not determined by any good thing that you or I might do, salvation is determined solely by the sovereign grace of God.

Now that doesn’t sit well with a lot of people. It doesn’t seem just that God would choose Jacob and reject Esau apart from anything that either one had done good or bad. That is what Paul has said. And Paul had had many discussions along these lines over the years with rabbis in the synagogues and the philosophers in the gentile marketplaces, and so Paul could anticipate this objection. And so he pauses in his defense of God’s faithfulness to His word to defend God’s right to sovereignly choose some and reject others.

And Paul doesn’t retreat from anything that he has said. For the apostle, the best defense is a good offense and he goes on the offensive to state in the strongest way that God’s initiative determines eternal destinies. He answers two questions: first, is God fair and second, are we responsible? It doesn’t seem so to the objector in this passage. If it’s true that God decides human destinies apart from anything in the person, well, that’s not right. And if He does, then He can’t blame people if they reject Him.

Paul takes up the first question or the first objection about fairness in election in verse 14. “What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there?”

Then he answers with the emphatic denial, “May it never be!” The thought of injustice with God is absolutely intolerable. Paul begins all of his thinking, all of his reasoning with the belief in God’s absolute righteousness. That’s his starting point. God is always right and cannot do wrong. He then goes on to support his denial and prove his point from scripture.

Paul’s whole answer in this passage is based on two assumptions: first, that the scriptures are the word of God and second, that what God actually does cannot be unrighteous. And that is where we must begin if we are to understand this chapter of the bible, in fact, if we are to understand the bible. We must be in submission to God’s word. This is the revelation of the God of the universe. It is inerrant, it requires submission. God is not under our standard of right and wrong. He cannot be called to account to the things we think are right.

He is the standard of what is right. Cannot do wrong. And that is where Paul begins. Then he goes on to explain God’s action from scripture by quoting Exodus 33:19, “For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’” Paul’s defense of God’s choice of some in election and His rejection of others is God’s mercy. In other words, the issue in salvation is not one of fairness, it’s not one of justice at all, it is about kindness, grace. When a person gives alms to a beggar, he isn’t considered unjust for giving his money to one and not giving it to another. Giving gifts is not like paying taxes or paying debts. A person may give to one person and not give to another without any injustice at all because he doesn’t own them anything. Charity is a matter of kindness.

The God’s mercy is not merely a matter of kindness, it is undeserved kindness. It is given to those who deserve judgment. God’s statement to Moses about having mercy upon whom He wills and being compassionate upon whom He wills was given after the incident of the golden calf, that’s the context in which that statement was made, when Israel had blatantly rejected the very God who had redeemed them out of slavery in Egypt. They had chosen another God, they’d committed apostasy and that’s when God makes that great statement. So if justice were the issue, then God would have destroyed that nation. Swept it away in a moment. And that is true of every one of us without exception.

Paul has clearly demonstrated in the early chapters of this book that we are all guilty. Chapter 3, he makes that point in sort of a summary fashion of all that he said from 1:18 on. There's none righteous. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We are all, like Israel, worshipping the golden calf. We all have our idols and would hold to them firmly apart from the grace of God. So we deserve wrath, we don't deserve mercy. Deserve justice, not salvation. One of the great impediments to understanding the word of God and the sovereignty of grace is the false assumption that we deserve the goodness of God, that we deserve kindness from God, that we merit something. That seems to be typical of our age that we deserve things, but it's typical of human nature in its relationship with God to think it merits God's good favor.

But we do merit something, we do deserve something, but what we deserve is God's wrath. We have no rights with God. We lost any claim to God's care when we fell in Adam and became guilty of his sin and inherited original sin and inherited his sinful nature and his bent toward evil. In fact, that's what the bible says repeatedly, but in Genesis 8:21, God describes the human race in that term, He says that man is inclined toward evil from his youth. That is the inclination of man's heart and man's will from his youth up. So if we were to have what we deserved, we do not have God's care, we lost the right to that in the fall. Mercy to anyone is undeserved and given only because God wills to give it.

It is His sovereign act and He has a right to give it to whomever He desires and to withhold it from whomever He desires. How can we argue with that? How can we presume to dictate to God who is to give what is His to whom He gives it? We are debtors to Him, debtors to mercy alone and in absolute need of mercy as Paul indicates in verse 16 where he concludes it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs but on God who has mercy. And with that statement Paul sweeps away any pretense man might have of free will. Meaning man's ability to act independently of God and choose God by himself.

People will argue fervently for that, but Paul explain, it is not man's will, it is not man's choice that determines God's mercy and not man's most earnest efforts, his running as Paul puts it, his exertion, his great exertion. Mercy is all of God. This is a consistent testimony of scripture. Jonah's great declaration in Jonah 2 is salvation is of the Lord. And how else could it be since we are all born into this world dead in

trespasses and sins without spiritual ability, without spiritual power to make any movement toward God. Also, that in Ephesians 2:1, “Dead in your trespasses and sins.” Back in chapter 8 of the Book of Romans, Paul made that very clear as well that we have no ability in and of ourselves. He says that no one subjects himself or herself to God’s law. In fact, he goes on to say, no one is even able to do so. We don’t have the ability.

The only reason that anyone is able to do so and the only reason that multitudes do is because God out of His abundant mercy gives life, ability and faith. Willing and running are not illusions. People do that. People do will and they do run. They do desire and purpose to obtain salvation. They make effort and they believe. They understand and they lay hold of the gospel and the truth of God by faith, but none of that is the cause of mercy. All of that is the product of mercy. It is the effect of mercy and grace.

And so the Psalmist can say in Psalm 119:32, “I shall run the way of your commandments, for you will enlarge my heart.” I’ll do what you have commanded, Lord, because you will enable me and that’s the only way I will do it. The New Testament equivalent to that is Philippians 2:12-13 where Paul says, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling,” it’s a way of saying will and run, be earnest, be diligent in the task that’s been set before you for, he goes on to say, it is God who is at work and you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

That is the only way that we can fulfill God’s commands, if He gives us the ability to do it. The only way we can believe the gospel is if God supplies us with the faith to believe it. No amount of human effort will move us out of our condition of condemnation. We can’t clear ourselves of sin. In reality, we cannot even begin to do that, begin to move, begin to run toward God and to resolve or will rightly. Those who maintain that we have a natural ability to choose God as we desire and when we desire, it all originates with us and not with God, they have failed where the medieval theologian Anselm who I quoted last week said they failed and not considering just how great their sin is.

That is an important starting point for all of us in our understanding of who we are and who God is and His word. Understanding just how great our sin is, understanding just how far we fell when Adam fell, just how wrecked and ruined the natural man is. So much so that all of the things in God’s word are foolishness to him

apart from God’s grace. We are saved only because of God’s sovereign mercy. It originates with Him. If it didn’t, if our salvation depended upon us in any way, we would never have it. So is it unjust for God to choose some and pass others by? No. It’s not a matter of justice. It’s not a matter of fairness. It is a matter of compassion, it is a matter of mercy and grace and because He is God and not man, He can choose whom so ever He wills to choose. He is sovereign in election. And likewise, God is sovereign in rejection.

Paul demonstrates that in the next verses where he moves on from the doctrine of election to the doctrine of reprobation. This is the other side of predestination. Election is the positive side, reprobation is the negative side. It is about God’s sovereign rejection of people for salvation. Paul describes it as hardening. He takes from the Old Testament. It is admittedly a difficult doctrine and has brought harsh criticism from people both inside and outside the church. Edward Gibbon said it made God a cruel and capricious tyrant, Erasmus argued that it made God unjust. Even John Wesley referred to the horrible decree of predestination.

Reprobation may be unpleasant, but it is the logical counterpart to election. If God has chosen some, it necessary follows that He had rejected others. But our understanding of God is not determined by human reason. We know God by revelation, but we do not know Him. So the question is, what say the scriptures on this matter? And the answer is they teach it. Proverbs 16:4, “The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.” What do we read here in this chapter? On verse 8 we read He has mercy on whom He desires and He hardens whom He desires. Verse 22, He is patient with vessels of wrath, prepared for destruction.

God gave a specific example of that in history in the way He dealt with the king of Egypt. Verse 17, Paul quotes from Exodus 9:16, “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole Earth.’” The purpose of this example is to show that God sovereignly reprobates just as He sovereignly elects. He sovereignly rejects just as He sovereignly chooses people for Himself. And in both, He is glorified because in His judgment, His power is made known, just as His mercy is made known and His salvation.

He revealed His mercy in saving a man like Moses. And He revealed His power in judging a man like Pharaoh. And that was God’s purpose for the king. That is what the Lord told Moses and Aaron to say to Pharaoh when they went before him to demand that he let Israel leave Egypt. Pharaoh was the most powerful man in the world that day. He was worshipped as a God. But the Lord said to him, “I raised you up.”

Some commentators have translated that, “Placed you upon the stage of history.” It’s a way of saying, “You are my actor to fulfill the role that I had given for you.” It’s not what an Egyptian God expected to hear from the God of Hebrew slaves because the Lord was declaring that Pharaoh was His creation and had been put on the throne of Egypt for His purpose. That purpose was to demonstrate God’s power in him and in that way give wide proclamation to His name and reveal himself as the true God throughout the whole earth.

That happened through the ten plagues that God brought on Egypt which brought about Israel’s deliverance and exodus through the Red Sea. And each plague occurred because Pharaoh’s heart was hardened against God and he resisted the Lord’s demand to let His people go. Pharaoh resisted, but it was God’s purpose and God’s doing. Throughout the Book of Exodus we read that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. We also read that Pharaoh hardened his own heart but only a few times. The large majority of the text state that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart.

And the first reference is to God hardening Pharaoh, not to Pharaoh self-hardening. That’s in Exodus 4:21 when God sent Moses back to Egypt to begin his ministry and as He sends him back, He tells Moses to perform the miracles that He would give him before Pharaoh, but He said, “I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.” Do the signs and wonders, but I will harden his heart so that he won’t respond to them. So it was God’s work according to His purpose. Pharaoh’s obstinate opposition became the occasion for God to display His great power in destroying the king and delivering His people.

As Pharaoh’s resistance increased, God’s judgments increased. So as each plague became greater, God’s power became more visible and He was revealed to be the one true God. And that way the Lord was glorified and His name was spread throughout the earth as the mighty God who defeated the Egyptians and saved His people. And we see that, for example, in Joshua 2:9 where we read of this very thing

when Israel’s conquest of Canaan began, the people of the land, the Canaanites were terrified because they had heard of what God had done to the Egyptians. Rahab the harlot told that to the two spies she sheltered in Jericho. And she told them that she had become a believer because of the reports of God’s greatness that had come to them.

So there was a good end to the severe side of God’s sovereignty. It made known His glory and His people were saved. Paul’s point is that God is just as sovereign in reprobation as He is in election and He is righteous. He is right in all of His actions. That’s the conclusion he makes in verse 18, “So then He has mercy on whom He desire, and he hardens whom He desires.” God is absolutely sovereign in the matter of who is saved and who is not. It is not based upon us, it is based solely on God’s will.

Why did God raise up Moses to be a deliverer and raise up Pharaoh to be destroyed? Not because Moses was better or Moses was deserving. Moses had serious flaws in his life. He committed a murder. He tried to hide it. He tried to bury the Egyptian in the sand. He then fled. Forty years later when God calls him to his mission, he resists it. He’s weak in his faith. He resisted persistently. So it’s not because there was something in Moses that commended him to God, the reason Moses was chosen for his role and Pharaoh for his was God’s sovereign will. He has mercy on whom He desires and He hardens whom He desires.

Now that doesn’t mean that God hardens hearts arbitrarily, randomly at some whim. It doesn’t mean that he makes good men sin. There are differences between God’s severity and His mercy. God has mercy on sinners who are undeserving. He intervenes in their lives to awaken them spiritually and bring them to faith. Those who are hardened though are also sinners. Doesn’t make good men bad. God doesn’t make them to disbelieve. They are already unbelievers and in rebellion against Him. Pharaoh was a wicked man. Pharaoh was an unbeliever. God hardened his heart in that unbelief. God hardened his heart in its rebellion and strengthened his will in its resistance so that Pharaoh freely chose to resist and hardened his own heart to the outworking of his own destruction and the fulfillment of God’s purpose. There’s no injustice in that.

In fact, because of sin, everyone deserves to be hardened fully and rejected eternally. It is mercy that prevents that and mercy that saves. But God was not under

obligation to save Pharaoh as He saved Israel. And He was not unjust in choosing Pharaoh to be the object of His wrath and the demonstration of His power. As Paul shows, God deals with people differently, showing mercy to some and hardening others all according to His sovereign will which is uninfluenced by us. That's the chief point of verses 17 and 18. He is free to choose some and reject others and in both He makes known His glory in the display of His attributes of power and grace.

What we learn from this is that we are completely dependent upon Him for everything and certainly for our salvation. It is not our doing; it is His alone. And if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, it should fill you with humility and gratitude that He showed you mercy. We see that in so many ways. Look at your life. Just consider it for a moment. Why were you born in the time and place that you were with all of the advantages that you have, physical advantages, sound mind, a healthy body? But also, all of the opportunities that you have with access to the bible and to the teaching of God's word. We have that on the radio, we have that in bookstores, we can go to any bookstore in this city and the many bookstores that there are and get bibles and commentaries. We can go to many churches throughout this city and throughout this land and hear the gospel preached.

Why is it that you were born in this place in this time? Why weren't you born a goat herder in some dark valley in Tibet under the influence of monks and prayer wheels? Only because it was God's good pleasure to create you as He did and to have mercy on you. Ah, but people don't like to hear that. They don't like to hear that God is sovereign over human affairs and human destinies. It goes against the common idea of human freedom and fairness. If I don't have a free will and God is absolutely sovereign, determining the end from the beginning, then I can't be held responsible for not believing in Him. If God is in complete control then men are puppets and can't be punished. You can't harden people and condemn them for their hardness, it's not fair.

This is the common objection and probably one, if you're thinking as we're going through this text, that you might have entertained and it's the very one that Paul raises and answers in verses 19 through 24. He had many discussions with people over these various issues and the common objections that came up are recorded here and that the common objections that are raised in our own mind, verse 19, "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?'"

Pharaoh may have disobeyed God’s commands, he may have disobeyed God’s revealed will, but he fulfilled God’s secret purpose. So how can he be faulted for that? Now that is a natural question that arises from Paul’s teaching here and there’s nothing wrong with asking how this can be and attempt to understand God’s ways. But a challenge to God’s sovereignty and righteousness is illegitimate. And that’s the nature of the question here. It is an objection to all that Paul has said which means it’s an objection to God’s revelation.

Paul answers it in a way that is illuminating not only for what he says but for what he doesn’t say. “On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it?” The response is a rebuke intended to give perspective that is very similar to that given in Isaiah 55:8-9 where God says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts.” His thoughts are infinitely higher than ours and His ways are past finding out. We cannot approach understanding God’s mind and His deeds. He is infinite, we are finite. WE are, as Dr. Johnson in his notes said, like children. We’re infantile in our understanding. We cannot grasp these things.

The study of God’s word, the study of God requires humility. It requires understanding these things, that it’s far higher than us. And so if that study is to be fruitful, then we are to be humble in our approach to the subject and humble in our approach to God’s word. We are to submit to God’s revelation of Himself. And the humility required is suggested in the analogy that Paul gives here between God and man. He is like a potter and we are like His clay.

This is a common illustration in the Old Testament of the relationship between God and man. Isaiah and Jeremiah drew on this image of the potter and the clay. The potter’s house was a regular part of village life in the Orient. And so the potter was a very familiar figure for the Creator. It’s found in Omar Khayyam, for example, who spoke of the potter and the pot. It shows the great gulf that exists between God and man. We are made of the stuff of pots, just clay, mere dust. We are creatures, not the creator. So the very idea of us challenging God and calling Him to account is as absurd as a pot questioning a potter about his right to make his clay in the form and for the purpose that he chooses. That’s what Paul says.

What he doesn’t say though is equally instructive. It doesn’t solve the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. To say that man does not have

free will does not mean that man does not act freely; he does. He freely chooses to do what's wrong, he freely chooses to act according to that evil inclination that in all of us. It means that we cannot choose God and cannot choose rightly apart from the grace of God. But that doesn't mean that we're not responsible to do so. We are and the bible is very clear about this.

You read through what Paul says in his writings and look at Paul's life in the Book of Acts and what he describes of himself, Paul was an active man. Paul was a great evangelist. In fact, he preached the gospel more than any of the other apostles. Teaching here of God's sovereignty didn't affect his sense of responsibility in the least. Paul held the two together, but he doesn't fit them together for us in this text. But more significantly, Paul doesn't qualify or correct anything that he said.

If the objection was a misinterpretation of Paul's teaching about God's absolute sovereignty and initiative in human destinies then we would expect Paul to correct it, wouldn't we? And we would expect that because he's done that already earlier in chapter 6, you'll remember, when he was teaching on free grace and that his teaching was misinterpreted as antinomianism. Paul corrected that. He said, "May it never be." And he's done that in other places as well, but he doesn't answer that way here because he was teaching that God does determine people's eternal destinies with all of the authority and purpose that a potter shapes the clay.

It's not the objector's understanding of Paul's teaching that he corrects, it is his attitude which was one of rebellion, one of insubordination. Paul objects to that then uses the illustration of the potter and the clay in verse 21 to reinforce even more his teaching on the absoluteness of God's sovereignty. "Or does not a potter have a right over the clay to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use or dishonorable use?" The question grammatically expects a yes answer just as a potter has the right to use his power over the clay to display his skill as an artist, so too God has the right to reveal Himself in the way He shapes humanity.

And as Paul explains in the next verses, "God displays the full range of His glory in those destined to inherit salvation and those destined for wrath. What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy which He prepared beforehand for glory." Two things to notice. First, God is patient with the human race. It is

fallen, it is sinful, but He endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.

Pharaoh is the best example of that. God could have destroyed him immediately and brought His people out of Egypt, but instead He gave Pharaoh many opportunities to repent, ten opportunities with ten plagues. Few have had such opportunities as Pharaoh had. But he was unwilling. And he is a type of all such people. So they are all without excuse. And secondly, God's patience towards vessels of wrath is for the sake of the vessels of mercy. He could have swept away the human race after the fall, but He didn't. He has endured this rebellious race and from it made vessels prepared for glory and made them in order to witness and enjoy the display of His glory for all eternity.

That is the great end of all things. That is the purpose of everything, the glory of God. And if it is difficult if not impossible to really appreciate and understand the word of God if we think that we have merit and we deserve God's goodness, then it is equally difficult or impossible to understand God's word and God's ways if we don't understand that the chief is to glorify Him. That is the object of all things. Paul is moving toward that great declaration which he will make at the end of chapter 11, the conclusion of this section of scripture.

Everything is from Him and to Him and for Him to His glory as he will say. So that is the purpose of everything, the glory of God, but to display the full range of His glory, God must first reveal His justice and power as well as His love and mercy. And so to that end, He purposed that some people receive mercy and are saved and some people receive His wrath and are condemned. We can only understand and enjoy His mercy as we see it against the backdrop of God's wrath from which His mercy has delivered us.

Some have said that makes God a tyrant and have rebelled against this idea of His sovereignty over man's destiny. But that is the God of Romans 9, that is the God of the bible, the only God that there is and the one with whom we must deal. Resistance to that changes nothing. Resistance doesn't make God different from what He is and what He has revealed Himself to be, and so the wise response is to submit. Kiss the son as the Psalmist said. To those who don't and who object to God's ways as set forth in the bible or try to qualify Him down, Martin Luther had one of the best

responses, he said, “Let God be God. He will be and He is, but recognize that and let Him be the God who is the God of the bible in your thinking.”

Luther’s development in theology has been compared to the Copernican Revolution. Copernicus brought great change to science. His contribution was to change people’s thinking about the construct of the universe from a geocentric universe to a heliocentric universe, from a universe in which the world, the earth is the center of all things to the sun being the center of all things. And Luther did much the same, introducing theology that is theocentric from that which was seen as anthropocentric, from a man-centered theology to a God-centered theology.

Luther came to that development himself and all of his theology and the theology of the Reformers was constructed around God. He is the center of the universe, not man. And so he made this great statement. Recognize that. Let God be God. Let Him be the center of your universe and understand that that is exactly what He is. Will be and He is. And those who do, those who submit to God’s revelation find great peace and great joy. He is sovereign and in control. What can be a greater comfort than that? To know that in spite of all the chaos that is around us, in spite of all of the uncertainties that we face from one moment to the next, God is absolutely sovereign and He is working out His will for a good purpose. While there is a severity to His sovereignty, His power and will are completely just and the means of displaying His undeserved mercy.

I know this is a difficult idea for many. I don’t think it’s difficult to see that this is what Paul is saying, but it is difficult to accept, to receive because it goes so contrary to the way we think. But it is the word of God and the influence this vision of God out of Romans 9 should have on our lives is profound. It gives perspective on life. We are here to serve God and bring glory to Him, not ourselves. And those who understand that and begin to live that way are the most helpful kinds of people. And as believers in Jesus Christ who bought us and saved us, we should be deeply humbled by His undeserved mercy and our complete dependence on Him for everything.

That alone has given us a few future in which we will be blessed with beholding God’s glory and enjoying that glory and enjoying Him forever. That’s what we should be living for now. That brings glory to God as a vessel of His mercy. Everyone will bring glory to God either actively or passively, willingly or

unwillingly, either in heaven or in hell. But all will glorify God. God's will will be worked out. The question is: how will you glorify Him? Today is the day of His patience. He is calling out His elect, His vessels of mercy. If you desire to be that, then believe in Jesus Christ. All who do are saved. Or will you continue to rebel so that His patience allows your sin to increase so that He might more fully display in you His wrath and His justice? How much better to become a display of His great mercy through His forgiveness? So look to Christ if you've not done that. If you've not believed in Him, believe in Him, turn to Him. He receives all who do. May God help you to do that and help all of us to understand these things better and to rejoice in God's mercy which He has displayed so abundantly to His people. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for that mercy for which we have been reading and considering. And while we recognize that for many these are difficult things to accept, this is what your word says. And have mercy on whom you have mercy and you have compassion on whom you have compassion. Father, we praise you for that, we praise you for the abundance of it and that you saved the undeserving such as we are, there be any attending who don't know you, who have not trusted in you, may they see their peril, that there are such things as vessels of wrath prepared for destruction and may they, knowing that, flee the wrath to come and flee to the cross of Jesus Christ. Pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.