

God's purpose shall never fail

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[0 : 00] Well now, please turn with me, if you would, to the passage we read in Romans chapter 11. We're coming this morning to one of the most difficult and controversial chapters in Romans, and very probably in the whole Bible.

A chapter which has been used and abused to serve all kinds of agendas, both spiritual and also political. So let me just say a word or two by way of introduction.

There are many rather wild interpretations of this chapter, but equally there are many differing interpretations by great and godly men whom I respect enormously and have learned a great deal from.

And that can be so. Surely must mean that any casual confidence or undue dogmatism, in our view, can't be a wise approach to this chapter.

In fact, Paul's own conclusion at the end is that it leaves him expressing wonder at God's inscrutable ways and unsearchable ways.

[1 : 11] So if Paul himself realizes that this mystery can't be fully grasped, then we'd be foolish, wouldn't we, to be anything other than cautious and humble ourselves. And in fact, three times, interestingly, in this chapter, he says, do not be arrogant, do not be conceited.

Second thing, it's a very long chapter, and there are some very difficult things in Paul's argument, and that means that in the time that we have together this morning, I can't possibly explain fully every single point of controversy.

I could try to do that, but it would take us many hours, and indeed it would take us many weeks. And I don't think that's the best way for us to spend our time. So I will try not to dodge every hard verse, but I'm sure that not all of your questions will be answered this morning.

So I might be able to answer some of them, and I'm very happy to speak to you afterwards if you'd like to. I have no guarantees I can answer. But what I want to do this morning is to focus on the big things that I think are clearer, and therefore must be the most important things that the Holy Spirit wants us as the church to be clear about.

So we're going to try and major on the main thing. Now Paul's gospel of grace, which is, as he says at the beginning of his letter, the power of God for salvation for all who believe, is a gospel, he says, that assures us of our eternal security with God through Jesus Christ and what he's done.

[2 : 44] But there are, aren't there, many challenges to that assurance, because, as we've seen and as we know, believers still sin. And the world around us is still suffering.

And all of us will still die. So we might ask, well, is that it, Paul? Does peace with God only mean that we have some kind of spiritual righteousness, some kind of spiritual relationship with God now, and that nothing else really changes all around us?

No, no, no, says Paul. Not at all. And as we saw, the whole of chapters 6-8 tell us that what we have now is not by any means the end of the story.

What we have now is just the very beginning of our salvation. We're united now to the risen Lord Jesus Christ by his Spirit, but that is just the first fruit, says Paul.

We're saved in hope of much, much more than that. Yes, we do still suffer with Christ, but one day the Spirit who raised up his body from the grave will also likewise raise up our mortal bodies, he says, to be glorified with him.

[3 : 57] And that's certain, says Paul. It's assured. Because, as we saw in chapter 8, those God predestined, he also called, and justified and glorified.

It is as good as accomplished. And so we can be assured of that future. But then, of course, chapters 9-11 deal with yet another reason that we could doubt.

What about Israel? Didn't God call them? And look, they've rejected God constantly. And look, you've said to us that God has rejected them because of their unbelief.

So doesn't that fact cast, again, huge doubt on this grand salvation, Paul? No, it doesn't, says Paul, as we've been seeing.

In fact, he says, it does the very opposite. Because, again, remember, the story isn't over yet. And what Israel's tragic stumbling shows to us is not God's failure, but it shows us God's extraordinary, marvellous grace that triumphs even over the tragedy, the evil, and the rebellion of human beings to magnify the sovereign mercy of his salvation.

[5 : 22] It's just more of the same great theme of Romans. Remember chapter 5, where sin increased? Grace increased all the more. It's not as though God's word has failed, Paul thunders in Romans 9, verse 6.

Why? Because he says, Israel is not what you think it to be. Israel is far, far bigger than you've ever thought. Israel is not just one race, the children of the flesh.

It's all the seed according to promise, he says. All whom God has called. Israel is not just one race, the children of the Lord. In chapter 9, verse 24. Not just from the Jews, but also from all the Gentile nations because of his enormous mercy.

So there's no distinction ultimately between Jew and Gentile. Look at chapter 10, verse 12. The same Lord, he says, is Lord of all and bestows salvation on all who call on him.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Jew and Gentile alike. So again he asks in chapter 11, verse 1.

[6 : 34] Has God rejected his people? No, absolutely not, says Paul. It might look like it to some of you. But that just is not so. Remember, this story is not over yet.

Let me say plainly and unequivocally again, says Paul, down in verse 26 of chapter 11. All Israel, all God's Israel will be saved, just as the scripture has promised.

But just so that none might ever be able to boast about this, whether Jew or Gentile, he is doing it in such a way as to show that it is all, whether you're a privileged Jew or whether you're a pagan Gentile, it's all through his grace and mercy alone.

For everyone. For God, he says, is saving everyone exactly the same way. Verse 32, he's confined them all over to disobedience so that he might have mercy on all.

So no one can boast at all except in the extraordinary, unsearchable ways of God. And in his abundant, overflowing mercy to give all the glory to him.

[7 : 50] For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen, says Paul. And that's it really in a nutshell. Paul does want to leave us rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God.

So we mustn't focus ourselves in this chapter just on Israel and her tragedy and disobedience, else we lose sight of God's glorious victory and his purpose.

Because that is what these chapters are expounding for us. The message is loud and clear right through these chapters, right through the whole of Romans. God's purpose shall never fail.

Not ever. But of course we do have many questions and perplexities and we're only human. And we can't see it all in the way that God can.

So Paul wants us to understand though what we can understand of this mystery, this revelation from God that we would never ever otherwise even begin to understand. He wants us to understand what God has told us of just how God is going to bring all this to fulfillment as he's promised.

[9 : 05] And above all he wants to encourage our faith in his certain gospel and, very importantly, our partnership in that gospel.

So let's look then a bit closer at the text to see what God is saying to us today as believers. So often we struggle to see just what God is doing in the world.

Just what he's doing in our lives, in the lives of our friends and our family also. What does he want us to learn? Well, first of all, in verses 1 to 10, Paul says to those like himself who grieve over the mass of Jews who are rejecting Jesus, their own Messiah, he says to them, don't be cast down.

Don't be cast down. Take heart in God. Trust God's persistent kindness and grace, even to disobedient and contrary Israel.

See, to any Jew like Paul who had followed Christ, the last verse of chapter 10 was deeply painful. The sheer persistent disobedience of unbelieving Israel.

[10 : 19] Painful. But on the other hand, to Gentile Christians, like us, most of us, it would be easy to be contemptuous, wouldn't it? And to assume that therefore God must have completely rejected the Jews altogether.

Indeed, to go even further, to despise the Jews, to hate the Jews perhaps, because they had rejected Christ, their own Saviour, the Lord of glory. And we have to admit, don't we, as Gentiles in the Christian world, that hatred of the Jews has been a shameful, shameful thing, all the way down history, and still is today.

And it's been so among the professing Christian church. And that is a deep shame. Not only among the Roman Catholic Church, where it has been particularly marked, but also elsewhere.

We have to acknowledge that. But, you see, Paul is telling us in this chapter that even if God had utterly rejected the Jewish people, there would be absolutely no warrant for anyone, least of all Christians, to think that somehow they were superior.

Absolutely not, as we'll see in the centre of the chapter, verses 17 to 22. But, in fact, Paul is unequivocal in his answer, isn't he here? God has not rejected his people, he says.

[11 : 43] And he goes on to explain how and why. Yes, he says there is a hardening of much of Israel. But it is only in part, he says in verse 25.

Because God is the God of persistent sovereign grace. God is a just judge. Yes, he is. He will not be mocked. And verses 7 to 10 here simply tell us what Paul has told us again and again through this letter.

That where people do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ, of righteousness through Christ, they ultimately will receive what they ask for. God himself will depart from those people.

And in the end, those who have hardened themselves against his word, like Pharaoh in chapter 9, in the end they will be hardened by God. Verse 7, they will be hardened so they cannot see.

They are judged justly and fairly for their disobedience and rejection. When people say to Jesus Christ, I don't want you.

[12 : 53] I do not want you as my Lord and Saviour. Go away, leave me alone. I will not have this gospel of yours. I will not live under your lordship. And we can't blame God, can we ultimately, for saying, alright, if that is your final word, then I will depart from you forever.

Everyone, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. That is absolutely plain in chapter 10, verse 13. None is forced away from the salvation in Jesus Christ, but many, alas, take themselves away.

And yet, even amid that judgment, see how persistently kind and gracious God is. Not one deserves to avoid God's judgment on their sin.

Least of all, someone like Paul of Tarsus, the persecutor of the Christian church. But look at me, says Paul in verse 2. I am a trophy of grace. I am a Jew.

A personal example of God's persistent kindness to the Israelites. Just as the past is full of examples, just the same way.

[14 : 08] He goes on to say, just like when Elijah was speaking about how Israel had so turned against God, surely God's whole purpose for them must be finished. And God says, no, Elijah, it's not even just you that I'm preserving.

I've got 7,000 others you've never even seen. And so it is at the present time, says Paul, when he's writing. As a remnant, he says, chosen by God's sheer grace, despite their rebellion and sin.

By grace, not works, he says, otherwise grace wouldn't be grace. Now you might not see it, just as Elijah didn't see it. But it's definite and it might be much, much larger than you can ever imagine.

7,000 was a lot in Elijah's time. A thousand times the perfect number seven. So don't be cast down. Take heart in God.

Don't underestimate what God is doing in this world just because you don't see it all. That's what Jesus said to his disciples, wasn't it, in Matthew 13.

[15 : 18] It's easy, isn't it, when you're out sowing the seed to see so little and assume nothing is happening. Remember the mustard seed, said Jesus. Tiny. But one day it'll be huge.

Remember the leaven. You can't see a thing, but it's doing its work. We tend to see, don't we, the seed that lands on the stones and the path or that's snatched away by the birds.

What you don't see, says Jesus, is the harvest day that's coming. 30, 60, 100 fold. Remember that day is coming.

So trust God. He is the God of persistent kindness and grace. Isn't that a word that we need to hear and be reminded of so often?

Not just on the question of Jewish unbelief, but among our own nation too, isn't it easy to be downcast? Isn't it easy to think that God has utterly abandoned his church in Scotland today?

[16 : 19] That he's abandoned those, perhaps of our friends or our families, that we think there may be no hope for anymore? Well, sometimes the situation as we look at it might be very, very depressing, mightn't it?

but for all who would despair, we need to be reminded that God is and always has been and always will be the God of persistent kindness and grace.

There may be many things in this chapter you can't understand, but look at verses 5 and 6. There you can understand. Four times we have the words grace, grace, grace, grace.

Take heart in the God of grace, says Paul. That is surely one clear message we can take home from this passage today, don't you think? Don't be cast down.

Second, Paul says, don't be confused. Have hope in God. Rejoice in God's pervasive kindness that's overflowing to the whole world even now.

[17 : 27] Again, what we see now is not the end of the story. God's hardening of Israel, Paul tells us, had a purpose because he is a God of sovereign mercy and grace.

It's the nature of that grace that it should abound all the more in the face of disobedience and opposition. And so instead of being thwarted by evil, it is magnified by evil and it is advanced by evil so that God's extraordinary patience with disobedient and contrary Israel in fact results only in mercy for many Jews despite their disobedience but also, says Paul, for multitudes of Gentiles the world over including us.

And that's the astonishing message of verses 11 to 32. It expands what Paul said very succinctly in just a few verses in chapter 9. You might want to look at chapter 9 verse 22.

What if God desiring to make known his wrath and to make known his power has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy whom he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

Isn't that an extraordinary concept? God choosing to show the world the eternal riches of his glory through being extraordinarily patient with the vessels of his wrath, rebellious Israel.

[19 : 12] While he calls vessels of mercy for salvation from both Jews and Gentiles. No one could have imagined God operating in such a way.

That's why in verse 25 Paul calls it a mystery. Not because we can't know it at all but because we couldn't possibly know it without God revealing it to us.

In all our conceited wisdom we would get it totally wrong. But Paul says he wants us to understand it. Look at verse 25. Three things in verses 25 and 26 sum up this mystery says Paul.

First that a hardening in part has come upon Israel. Many are hardened but some are believing. Secondly that it has a purpose and the purpose he says is to bring in the fullness of the Gentiles as they come in.

As they come in as we'll see into the olive tree of Israel. And this is the way verse 26 that God is saving all Israel. All that he has called to come in to the true Israel of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

[20 : 25] Don't be confused says Paul. I want you to see not only that this is what God is doing but how God is doing it. So that you'll rejoice in this extraordinary overflow of his grace and serve it along with me until God's kingdom is complete.

Look at verses 11 to 15 then first. Did they stumble in order that they might fall forever? No, by no means says Paul. Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles so as to make Israel jealous.

Was the primary purpose of this hardening that they might fall utterly into judgment? No. The primary purpose was that salvation would overflow to others to the Gentiles.

But not only that says Paul but it might fall back also to Israel through her becoming jealous in seeing this great salvation in the world and at last desiring the Christ that they had spurned.

So verse 12 their trespass their failure says Paul is what has enriched the Gentile world with the gospel of salvation. But just think he says how much more marvelous would their fullness be?

[21 : 45] That fullness must be the full number of Jewish believers that God has called and will call to salvation all through the ages through Jesus Christ. It's parallel to verse 25 the fullness of the Gentiles.

And that's what I'm longing for says Paul in verses 13 and 14. I'm magnifying my ministry to the Gentiles like you but I've got my eyes on my fellow Jews too to save some of them.

And you must share that desire too because that's the hope of all of us he's saying. For verse 15 if their current rejection has brought reconciliation to the whole world through the gospel what will their acceptance mean?

The fullness of verse 12 the salvation of all the Jews that God will save from every age. What will that mean says Paul? It will mean life from the dead he says. There's a lot of argument over what that verse means.

Some people take it to mean a great worldwide revival among Jews that after that will result in a further great turning of Gentiles.

[22 : 59] I think it's better to see what Paul is saying there about life from the dead as referring to what he speaks about all through this letter when he speaks about life from the dead.

He's talking about the day when God will give life to our mortal bodies when our bodies will be glorified in life just like Jesus' body. That's the great hope that our reconciliation in the present is the guarantee of, isn't it?

There's a real parallel to this verse in chapter 5 verses 9 and 10 where Paul says we've now been justified by his blood. How much more will we be saved by him from the wrath of God, from the judgment to come?

And much more, he says, now that we've been reconciled, shall we be saved in his life. That is, in the life to come. That's our future hope, isn't it?

And Paul, I think, is saying here, this is how, at last, that will come. Look down to verse 25, where he carries on the same theme that God is working out his purpose for both Jews and Gentiles together to bring them to glory.

[24 : 12] We'll come back to verses 16 to 24 in a bit, but verse 25, he picks up the thought of verse 15 and summarizes. Understand, he says, understand that this partial hardening of Israel, during which God's remnant of believing Jews is being added to so that more are saved through the gospel, as the gospel goes out into all the world to Jews directly, yes, but also indirectly, as Jews see this salvation in Gentiles and are made jealous.

It will go on and on until the fullness of the Gentiles come in and are saved. saved. That's how he says, in this way, all Israel will be saved.

God's whole saving plan will be complete at last and the full salvation that we long for will therefore be ours at last, life from the dead, the redemption of our bodies.

So rejoice, says Paul, in God's pervasive kindness that's overflowing to the world in the gospel and join in its progress. For that's how our hope at last is going to be realized and not before, when all God's Israel will at last be saved.

Now you see that I'm taking those words, all Israel, I'm taking them as meaning all God's elect, saved by faith, all down through the ages, right to the very end, both Jews and Gentiles together.

[25 : 54] Let me explain just very briefly why I think that's the best way to take what Paul means here. He can't possibly mean all Jews regardless of their faith in Jesus Christ, can he?

That would contradict everything else he says in this whole letter, everything else in the whole New Testament. Some people take it to mean the mass of Jews who are alive at some time in the future, although not necessarily every single individual Jew, but the mass of Jews or the mass of even the nation of Israel who will come to Christ through a great turning to Christ at some stage.

Again, there are all kinds of difficulties with taking it that way, not least to know exactly what could be included in all Israel. Do we mean all ethnic Jews and who exactly are they?

Does it include proselytes of those who have been converted to be Jews? What exactly does it mean? And if it doesn't really mean all in every single Jew, then there's not nearly that much assurance in it, is there?

Unless all really means all, how can we be sure it means very many at all? A fair case can be made for assuming that all Israel here in verse 26 means every elect Jew throughout the ages.

[27 : 17] That is the fullness of Israel in the same way as we would take that in verse 12. And therefore it would balance with the fullness of Gentiles in verse 25.

But I've come, I think, to be pretty persuaded that all Israel here must really mean the entire Israel of God, both Jews and Gentiles. Paul uses that expression in Galatians 6 verse 16 to mean very certainly that.

Let me just give you three reasons. Firstly, the whole argument of the epistle to the Romans and its universality seems to suggest that. All through this letter from the very beginning Paul has been redefining who are God's true people, God's chosen people, the people of true faith.

So in chapter 2 remember he says that a true Jew is not one who is one outwardly through circumcision but it's one who is one inwardly through circumcision in heart by the spirit. In chapter 3 he reminds us that all have sinned alike, both Jew and Gentile, that no one will be justified by works, that all alike are justified by faith through Jesus Christ, Jew and Gentile both.

God is one, says Paul. So there can be no boasting. In chapter 4 he promises that the promise given to Abraham by grace alone was given that way so that it would be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring.

[28 : 47] Not just Jewish believers but Gentile believers through faith because Abraham he says is the father of us all. I could go on but all, all is a vital and repeated word all the way through Romans and always it means Jew and Gentile together.

All saved by faith in Jesus Christ. So the whole letter I think argues for that. Secondly, the whole context in chapters 9 to 11 demand this I think.

Paul begins the whole section look back to chapter 9 verse 6 by saying that the word of God has not failed because not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.

That is the true Israel of God. But the true Israel Paul is talking about there is not a mere subset of ethnic Israel. In fact it's quite the opposite. Israel he says is far bigger than that.

It's all the children of promise he says who are reckoned to be true seed of Abraham chapter 9 verse 8. Who are they? Well in chapter 9 he tells us they are all whom God calls.

[29 : 57] All upon whom God has sovereign mercy. Chapter 9 verse 24 even us whom he called not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles. And in chapter 10 he tells us again who they are but this time puts it the other way around.

It's all he says who call upon the Lord who will be saved. All who obey the gospel. Both Jews and Gentiles. Chapter 10 verse 12 and 13.

So when in chapter 11 he begins with the question has God rejected his people? The answer is no. He is saving all his people together both Jews and Gentiles.

As grace flows out through Israel's rejection and back through their envy as even more Israelites are saved. Until at last through this extraordinary mysterious method all Israel will be saved.

And thirdly I think the immediate context confirms this. Look at verse 15 sorry verse 25. He speaks of the Gentiles coming in.

[31 : 10] Coming into what? Coming in to the olive tree of Israel that he's just been speaking about in verses 16 to 24. Three times he tells us Gentiles are grafted in to share in the root of Israel.

It's the same language exactly that Paul uses in Ephesians 2 and 3 where he speaks of the Gentiles coming to be fellow heirs sharers in the common wealth of Israel. And likewise in those chapters he calls it the same thing this great mystery.

So here he says the mystery revealed by God and astonishing to us is this that on the one hand God has hardened some in Israel while saving others and on the other hand through this he is bringing Gentiles to salvation by grafting them into the olive tree that is the family tree of Abraham who is the father of us all who have faith.

And that's what the prophets pointed to as the quote from Isaiah tells us in verse 26 and 27 the deliverer from Zion Christ will come for the whole world as well as for the sins of Jacob if you read where that comes from Isaiah 59 and 60 you'll see it's a chapter all about the nations coming in to Israel to find for going out all through the world from east to west and this is what is going on right now says Paul through my ministry of the gospel going out to all the world all Israel is being saved through faith in Jesus Christ from Jerusalem right to the very ends of the earth so it's true he says in verse 28 most Jews are enemies of the gospel but they're enemies he says for your sake unwillingly and unwittingly it may be but their enmity is serving

God's purpose of salvation to the world just as God's sovereign purpose was being served when they crucified their own Messiah without whom there would be no salvation for any what a mystery that is isn't it that the Messiah who came had to be rejected by his own people else there would be no salvation but it's true and so unbelieving Jews says Paul they're still serving God as they were chosen to do they're kind of beloved enemies he says in verse 28 beloved on account of the patriarchs and still with a calling however strange it may be and yes he says they do still possess many gifts and privileges they have the scriptures the covenants the promises all these things he spoke of in chapter nine but no privilege can guarantee them or anyone else salvation all who are saved by God into his true eternal

[34 : 14] Israel will get there one way and one way alone by God's mercy so look at verses 30 to 32 what's it all about it's just like verse 6 isn't it four times there we were told he's the God of grace so here four times we have the word mercy listen you Christian Jews and you Gentile Christians Gentiles Paul says you have got where you are by God's sheer mercy to you who are disobedient and desired no mercy now you have it through Israel's disobedience somehow Israel's disobedience her hardening was essential to God's plan that you must be saved extraordinary but also that every Jew who comes to salvation might also likewise be utterly humbled and know that it's nothing of their own merit nothing of their pedigree nothing of their privilege but only only through the extraordinary extravagant unsearchable mercy of

God for verse 32 God has consigned all over to disobedience that he might have mercy on all Jew and Gentile alike together humbled under the pervasive kindness of a God of sovereign mercy and grace to disobedient and sinful enemies of God which all of us were little wonder isn't it that Paul burst into a great peen of praise oh the riches the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God and that surely should be our reaction too shouldn't it perhaps it's the chief application of these verses our worship but of course real worship is much more isn't it than just the praise of our lips we'll see that in chapter 12 but Paul has a very practical application of all of this to our lives today as Gentile

Christians look at verses 16 to 24 he tells us verse 13 he's speaking especially to Gentiles if you grasp this mystery he says do not be conceited humble yourselves rather before God be humbly grateful to God and be humbly grateful for the Jews never forget that it's you Gentiles who have been invited into their great family tree of salvation it's not the other way around it's a holy family you've been invited into he says verse 16 the root of the patriarchs holy God set apart their forefathers not yours to receive the promises of the great Messiah and to bring the Messiah into history everything you have as Gentiles and that's most of us we have from sharing in the root of that tree of salvation so don't you dare be proud says Paul verse 18 don't be arrogant towards unbelieving

Jews branches broken off because only because they were broken off could you be grafted in as a wild shoot an outsider an interloper that root supports you not the other way around salvation said Jesus is of the Jews to a Samaritan who hated the Jews I wonder how Arab Christians take that word today I wonder how some of our Iranian friends take that word today salvation is of the Jews don't be arrogant towards the branches says Paul and that goes for all Gentile Christians friends we must never ever scorn the Jewish people some Christians speak as though Israel has been utterly replaced by the Christian church quite the reverse says Paul here now you have been grafted into Israel you have been grafted in to become true

Jews not by circumcision or the law but by faith in Jesus Christ we says Paul to the Philippians we are the true circumcision who believe in Christ and we must humbly rejoice as Gentiles in our Jewish Saviour and in our Jewish salvation don't be arrogant towards Jews and don't be arrogant or proud before God says Paul in verse 20 as if somehow we have some merit before God as the true Israel not at all says Paul you stand by faith alone the humble faith that receives in empty hands the mercy of God that marvels at his grace to me a sinner all real faith is humble faith faith that continues verse 22 in God's kindness daily thankful for God daily penitent not pride pride is the cardinal sign of unbelief in the heart and that says verse 22 that attitude can only result in judgment there can be no pride in a true

[39 : 45] Christian or in a true Christian church there can be no pride where the grace and mercy of God truly reigns and yet I have heard Christian people with great pride and conceit talk about their understanding of the doctrines of grace and yet heaping scorn on other Christians who don't properly understand the doctrines of grace as they do in a totally graceless manner you need to be very careful real grace is humble not proud it stands in awe says Paul of God's kindness and it breathes God's kindness for all to see grace among Gentile Christians and Gentile churches should of itself make Jews envious of what we have says Paul and presumably should make everybody envious what would Jewish visitors coming into our fellowship here or anybody else for that matter what they see to make them envious of what we have what would they see to make them fall down on their faces and say at last

I have found where the true God dwells he is in the midst here there is no mistaking it well a church that grasps the mystery of God's persistent and pervasive mercy and grace will never be conceited will be humble and kind and gracious and merciful full of the sweet fragrance of the Lord Jesus that attracts everyone who comes into contact with it finally says Paul if you really understand this mystery don't be complacent be heralds for God heralds of his abundant mercy and grace you'll see from my understanding of this chapter that I've not read it as there were a prophecy about the future of a certain great worldwide turning of Jews to Christ as a people or as a nation seems to me that Paul is saying that all

Israel is being saved now three times in verses 30 to 31 he says mercy is coming to Jews and Gentiles now through the ministry of the gospel and that it will do at last until all Israel are saved that is what I think he's saying here but the danger if that is your view is a tendency to pessimism isn't it and a very low expectation of what God will do among Jews or even among Gentiles I call it apathetic amillennialism that's the danger of that view the opposite danger for those who are very convinced that there will be a great future reversal of Israel and a great revival the opposite danger is that that leads to complacency of a different kind as though there's very little for us as God's people to do so we just wait and long for whatever God is going to do and often focus a lot less on evangelism than on trying to read the signs of the times and speculate about what

God might do and when he might do it so I want to close with this this morning I want to put to you that the most important verse in this whole chapter is not verse 15 or verse 26 and how we interpret that but verse 23 and 24 especially verse 23 seems to me that whatever your view of the future of Israel this verse has something very powerful to say to you if you passionately believe that God is going to restore Israel en masse in vast numbers then you must take verse 23 a very very seriously this can only be says Paul if they do not continue in their unbelief they turn instead to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and we saw in verse in chapter 10 faith says Paul comes by hearing and to hear the gospel must be preached and people must be sent to preach not just directly to Jews but as Paul says so clearly in this chapter to all the Gentiles of the world to attract the envy of the

Jewish people so if that is your view of the future of the Jews you cannot be complacent can you you're convinced God's will is for a great turning of Israel then you will devote your prayers and your time and your talents and your money to evangelizing both Jew and Gentile alike won't you you'll have a ceaseless heart for mission on the other hand if you don't see a certain promise of a future turning of Israel here then you must take verse 23 be very seriously God has the power to graft them in again he grafted you in says verse 24 how much more easily will he graft back into their own olive tree branches natural Jewish Israelites and if we're seeing not much of that in our world today then the fault is not in God's power but it must be in God's people for how they believe on him they have never heard and how are they to hear without someone preaching and how are they to preach unless they are sent says Paul so you can't be complacent either can you you also must devote your time and your talents and your money to evangelizing

[45 : 20] Jews and Gentiles alike so friends there are many things in this chapter that we could disagree on and that are hard to understand but I find great comfort that this much is clear that our God is certainly a God of persistent kindness it's grace grace grace grace in verse 6 and it's mercy mercy mercy mercy in verse 31 grace and mercy for all Jew and Gentile alike insiders and outsiders those who were once near and are now far off and those who have always been far off for all who turn from proud unbelief to humble faith and trust in our Lord Jesus Christ God has the power to graft in wild branches and natural branches to the riches of his great salvation and he is doing it now and he will go on doing it until every last branch and twig is grafted in but our part imagine it we do have a part says Paul our part is to declare this great grace and mercy to the world and to demonstrate this great grace and mercy to the world in our lives in our fellowship as humble heralds of the kindness of our great

God well may God help us to continue in his kindness to the very end let's pray oh the depths of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgments how inscrutable his ways for who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid for from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory forever Amen