

God's promise has never failed

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[0:00] I'll turn, if you would, with me to Romans chapter 9. On Tuesday evening, Tom McGill and Robin Brough and myself sat through a special meeting of Glasgow Presbytery to discuss our new Presbytery plan.

It's a plan to shut down more churches and to reduce the number of ministers from around 165 to 130 in Glasgow Presbytery over the next three years.

It's part of a wider need for the Church of Scotland to reduce ministry posts across the board by about 20% over the next three years due to the huge financial deficit that the Church faces.

And the truth is that the Church of Scotland, like so many other UK church groupings, is in a crisis of decline. Financial decline, numerical decline and theological decline.

It's ironic because this comes after a year where we've just celebrated the 450th anniversary of the Scottish Reformation. And this year where we celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Authorised Version, the King James Version of the Bible that has given such privileged access to God's Word, to our nation, for nigh on half a millennium.

[1:31] Privilege after privilege at the hand of God, and yet so many of our kinsmen according to the flesh are utterly disinterested, in fact hostile to the faith of our fathers.

So has the Gospel failed in Scotland, in the United Kingdom, in the whole of Western Christendom? It certainly appears so in the early 21st century, and plenty of voices would like to tell us that.

So can we as Christians really give our lives to what seems to be such a lost cause? And what price then, the assurances, the wonderful assurances that we were basking in last time at the end of Romans chapter 8?

Is God's promise really powerful to do what it says it will do, eternally? In the face of very many apparent, perplexing failures of that promise here on earth.

Well it's this question, indeed a very acute form of this question, thrown up by the whole problem of the unbelief of Israel, of the Jewish people in the main, that these chapters, Romans 9 to 11, address.

[2:52] Paul's already addressed many problems and challenges to his Gospel. I'm not ashamed of this Gospel, he says right at the beginning. It's the power of God for salvation.

But some were ashamed and some doubted it, not least because this Gospel claimed to deal with sin and with death itself. And yet, what do we find? Christian believers still go on sinning and Christian believers still die.

But as we've seen, the answer in chapter 6 to 8 of Romans was yes. That's because God's plan is not yet complete. There's more to God's salvation than you ever imagined.

He's renewing, not just you, but the whole cosmos. And so although we are justified, although we are already sons of God, we must wait.

Wait for our full inheritance until that great day of resurrection. But the future is secure. Chapter 8, verse 30. Look again. Those he predestined, he also called.

[4:01] And those he called, he also justified. And those he justified, he also glorified. It is as good as done. Because his sovereign call of grace guarantees the glory that is to come.

Nothing can separate those who are called to be his forever from his love. But you see, that very assertion now begs a question.

A question that's been nagging all the way through this letter to the Romans. Because the Gospel, says Paul, is the power of God for salvation to the Jew first. But the hard fact is that most Jews were not believing the Gospel.

In fact, they were opposing the Gospel. So how on earth do you account for that, Paul? Now that is no light question. In verses 1 to 5 of chapter 9, wrestle with it.

Paul quickly descends from the heights of joy and security at the end of chapter 8 to the depths of pain and of anguish here in these verses.

[5 : 12] Look at verses 1 to 3. The pain is very, very real. He appeals to God, he says, as a witness to his great sorrow, his unceasing anguish for his kinsmen, his fellow Jews.

He says that he could even pray that he himself were accursed, cut off from Christ. The very thing he's just said is impossible.

So great is his passion for their tragic situation. But they are accursed and cut off from Christ. And that clearly is their situation.

Because, as you'll go on to say in chapter 10 and 11, because they have not obeyed the Gospel. They have disbelieved God's ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ.

And so they are cut off from his saving mercy. They are lost eternally, if they continue as they currently are. Now, Paul's grief here is enough to make it abundantly clear to us that there can be no hint that the Bible teaches that the Jewish people will be saved in any other way than through faith in Jesus Christ.

[6 : 28] Some people want to say that. You hear that quite a lot today. There are two covenants. There's one for Christians who are saved through Jesus, but there's another one for Jews who will be saved quite apart from Jesus Christ.

Therefore, there's no need to evangelize Jews. But that can't possibly be so. Paul's pain is so real just because their terrible situation is so real outside of Christ.

But verses 4 and 5 show us that the perplexity is also very real. These who reject the Christ, the Messiah, these are Israelites.

To them, of all people, God has given such privileges of his grace. To them, most naturally and most obviously, belong all these wonderful things that he has just talked about in Romans chapter 8 that are for all believers in Christ.

The adoption of sons. The covenant promises. The revelation of God's holy law. They came from the patriarchs. From Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

[7 : 34] And from them. What privilege? From them came the Messiah, the Christ. All Israel's privileges come to a climax and find their fulfillment in Christ himself.

In whom, says Paul here in verse 5, in whom the God of Israel himself came to them. In the flesh. And yet they rejected him.

Their own God. He came to his own, says John. But his own received him not. And so, therefore, not only is the pain real and the perplexity real, but the problem is very real.

Hasn't God's ancient covenant promise been shown to be totally without power? Ineffective, even for his own people.

Hasn't God's word failed? You're saying, Paul, that our assurance for the future, for our full salvation, that it rests on God's sovereign election.

[8 : 43] That those he calls will be his forever. But God chose Israel. And they have fallen away.

So doesn't that mean that God's word can fail? In fact, that it has failed. You see, the problem is very real. And that's why we have chapters 9 to 11.

Just as it's why we had chapters 6 to 8 that answer the real problem of the fact of ongoing sin and death. Paul's got to answer this problem of the ongoing rejection and unbelief by Israel and by the majority of the Jewish people.

Has God's word not failed, Paul? Well, his answer is stated firmly and unequivocally in verse 6.

God's word, he says, has not failed. And once again, just as in chapters 6 to 8, he explains that fully and he explains it from God's holy word, the Old Testament.

[9 : 55] Far from failing, he says, God's word has been fulfilled. And it's been fulfilled in a way that's much more than you could ever have begun to imagine. And it will go on being fulfilled also amazingly and abundantly in the future.

Until not only are all Israel saved, but also the fullness of the Gentiles will also be saved.

And it will be done, says Paul, in an extraordinary, marvellous way. Just as chapter 5, verse 20 says, where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so, says Paul, Israel's present rebellion against the gospel is the means by which God's grace will abound more and more and overflow to the whole wide world.

And also rebound back upon Israel itself. Their trespasses, chapter 11, verse 12, means riches for the world.

But more than that, chapter 11, verse 31, by the mercy shown to Gentiles, Israel also will receive mercy. The great goal of God's promise is that abundant, overflowing mercy will overflow to all, to every people, every tribe and language and nation.

[11 : 29] So chapters 9 to 11 are a journey from great tragedy to even greater triumph. Begins here with the great tragedy of the historical people of God, the Jews.

And it is real tragedy, full of pain and perplexity and great grief. As is all unbelief and rejection of the gospel, especially, especially where God has given great and abundant privileges.

But it ends where God's working always ends, with even greater triumph for the eternal people of God. A triumph so vast and so great and so cosmic that even Paul's present grief and sorrow is utterly eclipsed by the adoring joy of God's overflowing worldwide mercy.

Just listen to how he ends this section in chapter 11. Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the 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? Or who has given to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things.

[12 : 43] To him be glory forever. You see how the focus there is all on God. From him and through him and to him. The gospel of God I'm expanding, says Paul.

If you focus on man and his sin and his rebellion and his rejection of God, then always there will be pain and perplexity and problems. But look up to God and you will begin to see the glory and the mercy that will make us marvel.

Indeed, what he tells us in these chapters is again that man's sin and rebellion can only serve to magnify the grace and the mercy of God. It's rather like when you have a dark, dark backcloth to light up the sparkling beauty of a jewel like a diamond.

Well, that's what we have here in Romans 9. Verses 1 to 5 are indeed a dark, dark backcloth of pain, of perplexity. But against it we begin to see the brightness of God's rich mercy shining marvelously down the ages to achieve all that he has promised.

And indeed much, much more than any of his people could ever have imagined. So let's look then at these verses. Chapter 9, verses 1 to 29 where the message is absolutely clear.

[14 : 14] People may falter and may fall but God's sovereign promise has never failed. His word, his covenant promise of saving righteousness has been fulfilled marvelously and mercifully and multinationally even as the Old Testament scriptures themselves testify right from the very beginning.

Paul said back in chapter 3, verse 21 that the law and the prophets all bear witness to the saving righteousness of God in Christ for all who believe. And in fact, in chapter 9 here he's showing us exactly how the law and the prophets did indeed show that and he proves from them that God's working and God's ways have never changed, never failed and never will fail.

So then, God's word has not failed says Paul in verse 6. How is that so? Well first, look at verses 6 to 13 where he says it's clear God's pattern of saving righteousness is unchanging.

God's sovereign, gracious, covenant promise of salvation for the world has always been progressed solely through his electing grace.

His electing call says Paul here. Not all Jews in Paul's day have believed the gospel. In fact, the majority didn't.

[15 : 47] And Paul says I freely acknowledge that. But as I've already said back in chapter 2, you're not a Jew just because you're a Jew outwardly. A Jew is one inwardly.

And real circumcision he says is a matter of the heart by the spirit not by the letter below. So here he says it again in verse 6. Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.

That is the true people of God who are circumcised in heart. And anyone he says who knows the law and the prophets for themselves surely must know that. It's been that way from the beginning. Always there's been a distinction between the mere children of the flesh and the children of the promise. Look at verse 8. It's the children of promise alone says Paul who are not the word counted reckoned as offspring as true seed of Abraham.

Now remember chapter 4 what is counted what is reckoned is not by birthright not by works but only by God's grace. that's always been God's pattern says Paul.

[16 : 56] So it was verse 7 with Abraham's own sons. It was through Isaac not Ishmael that your offspring will be named literally called.

It's the same word as verse 11 God's sovereign call. And so it was verse 10 with Isaac's sons. And here it's even more pointed isn't it? It's not a matter of parenthood or pedigree.

Nothing to do with the fact that Isaac was legitimate and Ishmael wasn't. Isaac's children had the same mother and the same father. Indeed they were conceived in the same moment.

They were twins. But it wasn't says Paul a matter of primogeniture the right of the firstborn nor was it a matter of performance. They were both unborn he says they had done nothing either right or wrong good or bad.

Every single human factor is utterly set aside and even reversed. And rather verse 11 in order that God's purpose in election might continue not because of works but because of his call.

[18:10] That's why Jacob was chosen and not Esau. And indeed history bears that out as verse 13 says. It's a quote from Malachi about the relative destinies of Israel that is Jacob's descendants and Edom Esau's descendants.

Israel was singled out as the nation for God's special mercy whereas Edom was not spared for her wickedness and evil ways. It says love and hate there.

It's not really talking about the emotions of God but the action of God in what he did. Now the focus there is on these national callings of Israel and Edom but that doesn't mean that there is no implications for God's electing grace for individuals to salvation.

That's become a popular view that it only refers to the calling of nations not to salvation of people really since Karl Barth and it's even followed by the excellent commentator Charles Cranfield but Paul's whole argument here is about why only some Jews believe the gospel and others don't.

So clearly he is dealing with the issue of individual salvation as well. Nevertheless we mustn't try and force out of this text what Paul isn't focused on.

[19:31] Paul's chief concern here isn't to expand the doctrine of election and predestination and its significance. In fact he's done that already in chapter 8 as we've seen. But rather what is Paul saying?

He is simply saying look God's pattern of saving righteousness that calls out a people within a people that's not new. It's been there from the very very beginning.

And that's what you're seeing now. And because you're seeing it now it doesn't mean God's promises failed. It means exactly the opposite. It just proves that this gospel I'm proclaiming to you is establishing the law itself.

He said that back in chapter 3 verse 30. Our gospel establishes the law proves it to be right.

Because the law itself testifies to God's electing grace right from the very beginning.

God has chosen always to work not in the obvious human way, not in the man exalting way, but in the man humbling way. not the firstborn, not the fittest, not the deserving, not the attractive, but by his call alone, his electing call of sheer grace.

[20:54] Always God's true offspring, the seed of Abraham, have been reckoned, counted by God's promise through God's call to the real obedience of faith.

We saw that in chapter 4, remember, about Abraham. In order that the promise might rest on grace and be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring, who are not just of the law, not just Jewish by the flesh, but also share the faith of Abraham.

That's how God has always called his people. It's a very humbling message, isn't it? Especially to any believers in any church who might quietly boast to themselves that they've got a greatly privileged pedigree in the faith.

You might have been born in God's marvelous providence into a thriving evangelical church. You might have been in a sound reformed church all your life.

You might be an elder in that church. Your own father might have been a revered and faithful preacher of the gospel. But none of that means that you're anything other than just the child of the flesh, says Paul.

[22:08] It's God's sheer grace. His grace to you alone, made real through his call in obedient faith that loves and follows Jesus.

It's that alone that makes you a child of promise. Anything else at all is just utter presumption on your part or mine. It's very humbling.

And yet, that presumption is something that can so easily be harbored, isn't it? Especially among those who've had the greatest privileges in life. Isn't that right? And that's exactly what Paul's talking about here.

We are those who have known the doctrines of grace, the covenants, the law, the glory of the reformed faith. Well, don't be haughty, says Paul. Be humble. So did Esau and so did Ishmael in their background. It's humbling to come to terms with God's pattern of saving righteousness.

[23 : 07] But only by grace and his call can I enter and can I stand before him. And yet also it's wonderfully, wonderfully comforting, isn't it?

For the humble, for the spiritually bankrupt, because it's his pattern to call precisely those unlikely ones, the unexpected ones, the unlovely ones, the twisted limping Jacobs of this world, are the ones that he calls by his grace.

I came, said Jesus, not to call the righteous, but to call sinners. That's his saving pattern.

In verses 14 to 18 he moves from the patriarchs to the time of the Exodus. But still he's defending from the law itself how the gospel is utterly consistent with God's unfolding covenant and promise right from the very beginning.

And so just as God's pattern is unchanging, so also in these verses he says God's plan of saving righteousness is unchallenged. Unchallenged either by his people's disobedience or by his enemies' defiance.

[24 : 22] God's sovereign, gracious, covenant promise for salvation for the whole world has always been progressed, says Paul, only by his extravagant mercy.

Could be, if you look at verse 14, that the question is simply a repetition of the implied question in verse 6. Has God's word failed? That word injustice or unrighteousness is the opposite of God's righteousness, his saving promise to make all things right.

So to say is there unrighteousness with God, it may be just to say has he been unfaithful? In other words, has his promise come to nothing? That's how Christopher Ash takes it in his excellent book that I know some of you are using it, *Release the Word*.

But I think there is more than that here and I think our translation injustice gets the right sense. In chapter 3 verse 5, Paul raises the same question.

Is God unrighteous? Is he unjust to inflict wrath on us? That is on Israel for her unfaithfulness. I think that is the question that Paul is bringing up again here.

[25 : 35] Is God unjust to pass over some and not to call some? After all, as you've said, Paul, there are some passed over it seems even in the womb before morally they can be responsible for anything, good or bad.

That's a question that troubles people. Maybe it troubles you. It's a common thing that I get asked, especially by young Christians. Well, Paul's answer here is utterly decisive and indeed devastating. Let's not get ourselves tangled up, he says, in the mysteries of eternity. All we need to do, says Paul, is look at the plain facts of history and we'll soon see where injustice and unrighteousness lie. And it's not with God. Look at man's story, look at Israel's story indeed, and ask the question, is God unrighteous in dealing with these people?

Far from it is the answer. Indeed, he is extravagantly merciful in the face of the most dire disobedience and even in the face of despotic defiance.

[26 : 51] Even when he does justly punish evil, even that, says Paul, serves God's primary purpose which is his abundant mercy for his people and for the whole wide world.

Let's look at how the words mercy and compassion fill these verses. Verses 15 and 16 are referring to the story of the golden calf.

You can read about it in Exodus 32 and 33. It's a shocking story of rebellion and disobedience of the Israelites against their saviour God who has just brought them out from the despotic tyranny of Egypt after everything God has done for them.

And while Moses himself is even on the mountain receiving the revelation of God's marvellous saving covenant, in the midst of that they utterly turn their back on him and turn to idolatry.

It's utter apostasy and total rejection. And God judged the people. Many of them died. But every single one of them deserved to be rejected by God.

[28 : 03] Justice? You want justice? justice? Not one Israelite should have been spared if there was justice, absolute. And yet God said to Moses, I will have mercy.

I will have compassion. None deserve it. But because I am who I am, I will have mercy. See, God's mercy is what defines him as the God that he is.

Moses said to God, you can read it for yourself later, he said, show me your glory. And God said, yes, I will do that. I'll proclaim to you my name, the Lord, and I will be gracious and I will show mercy.

And he proclaimed to Moses, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in covenant love and faithfulness. Is God unjust?

Is God unfaithful? No, he is the God of utter faithfulness and utter abounding mercy. He is just to punish evil, as verse 17 here makes clear.

[29 : 18] He punished the despotic tyrant Pharaoh, his enemy. And yet, even that he did in such a way as to serve his great mercy and to further his plan.

Pharaoh wasn't just cut down immediately. Do you read Exodus 9, verse 25? God says that to him. I could have cut you down long ago, says God to Pharaoh, but no. And the very next verse is quoted here in verse 17.

No, you are preserved still standing, Pharaoh, so that even God's judgment would serve his plan of worldwide mercy.

That the power of God to save his people would be displayed. that the name of God, the name of all mercy and compassion would be proclaimed, says Paul, in all the earth.

You see, God will, says verse 11, God will progress his plan. His purpose in election will continue, not through human works, but through his call, through his sheer sovereign grace.

[30 : 27] works. But it has to be that way, because history tells us plainly that man's works are nothing but arrogant defiance, like Pharaoh, and disobedient unbelief, like even God's own people.

And yet, God's plan is unchallenged. How can it be unchallenged? Only because he will have mercy. Only because he has constantly shown mercy.

People often accuse God of being unjust. Why don't you judge the wicked God? You see, God either must be unjust, or he can have no power, he must be impotent, otherwise, he would set everything right in the world.

But the Bible says, no, God is not unjust. God will judge the world, but above all, he is merciful. And his mercy is bigger, greater than you can possibly ever imagine.

Actually, I often think it's God's mercy that's more of a problem for us than his justice. Because we, by our nature, are not merciful, are we? When did you last hear a mob baying for mercy?

[31 : 48] We want justice, don't we, for others, not for ourselves, and mercy for us, but not for others. But even God's justice serves his mercy.

He hardens Pharaoh, he doesn't cut him off immediately, to serve the greater purpose of his mercy for the world, so that his name will be proclaimed in the whole earth. Just as even now, Paul is going to come to in the next chapters, just as even now, hardened, unbelieving Israel is serving that same purpose of worldwide mercy.

That's a staggering claim, Paul's going to meet. But nothing has changed. His promise hasn't failed. His plan of saving righteousness is unchallenged either by defiance or by disobedience.

Rather, it continues to be served always by God's extravagant sovereign mercy. Mercy like the wideness of the sea.

And that's where Paul guides our thoughts in these last verses from verses 19 to 29. God's promise hasn't failed miserably. It's flourished mightily. Just as the scriptures themselves constantly said.

[33 : 09] God's purpose of saving righteousness, says Paul, is universal. God's sovereign, gracious, covenant promise of salvation for the whole world has been served always by his extraordinary patience.

You see, another question is raised in verse 19. God's sovereign like this, then why blame us? Why blame Pharaoh if God himself hardened him?

Why blame Israel for rejecting him? The clear implication of a question like that is that we humans are more just than God.

And that we can blame God and that we can pass judgment on God. And notice that Paul does not therefore answer that question. He could have.

He could have pointed out from Exodus that Pharaoh's hardening was simply God giving him over in the end to his own self-hardening because that's what happened. Just as in chapter 1, God gave human beings over to their own self-generated perversity.

[34 : 19] But no, Paul doesn't even deign to answer that question. Because that kind of question ought never to be asked of God. Instead, what Paul does do is he answers the attitude that

generates such a question.

Verse 20. Who are you, O man, to answer back to God? You don't dare malign his power, he says in verses 20 and 21.

That's like a piece of clay saying to its molder, the potter, what are you doing with me? Again, Paul's language is coming from the scriptures, not this time from the law, but from the prophets, the prophets who spoke before and during the time of God's great judgment on Israel in the exile.

The image of the potter appears several times in Jeremiah 18, for example, or in Isaiah 29 that he quotes here. And in all these places, God is telling arrogant, self-assured Israel, that it's not they who are in control of God, but God who is in control of them.

That's, of course, something that the human heart finds very difficult to accept, doesn't it? Of course, there are many mysteries in life that we cannot understand.

[35 : 36] Of course, there are all kinds of real questions that perturb us. But the question is, what is our attitude when we ask these questions of God?

Is it to be humbly recognizing that God is God and that we are his creatures? And we're saying, Lord, I need, I want to think in a right way, a godly way, a reverent way about these things that perplex me.

Or when we're asking these questions, are we, in fact, accusing God and blaming God and finding fault with God? God. Now, if that's the case, what that shows is that we don't want God to be God, we want God to be our servant and dance to our tune.

Remember what we read in Ecclesiastes 5 the other week. Be not rash with your mouth to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth.

There are secret things, says the Bible, that belong to the Lord our God, Deuteronomy 29, verse 29, because we are not God. But the things revealed in the words of the scriptures, they are for us, so that we might be humbly obedient people before God.

[37 : 01] And what is revealed in the scriptures teaches us that far from maligning God's sovereign power, we ought to be marveling at his sovereign patience.

These very scriptures about God as potter and Israel as clay, bear testimony that even despite Israel's sin and apostasy, God would, like the potter, reshape something beautiful out of something that had to be remolded through a terrible crisis of judgment.

So look at verse 22. what if God, even in his judgment of his defiant enemies in the world, the pharaohs and all others like him, and in the judgment of his disobedient and rebellious people, like Israel in the wilderness under Moses, or like apostate Israel before the exile, or even unbelieving Israel, Jewish people in the world today, what if God's plan and his purpose is so much bigger and more wonderful and more merciful than you in your tiny little human mind could ever possibly imagine.

So that everything he does, and everything that he allows in time and history, however perplexing it is to us, is in order, verse 23, 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, just as he called Isaac and Jacob, not from Jews only, but also from the Gentiles, from the people of the whole wide world.

Does that put a different perspective on things? As to why God does what he does, even when it seems to us that perhaps he's been in the wrong, he's been acting unrighteously.

[39 : 05] It's not that he's powerless to show himself just. Indeed, verse 22 says, he desires to show his wrath and make known his power.

But because he is the God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, because he is that God, he is patient.

He endures vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, all who oppose him, who defy him, even his own hardened people, for the sake of his glorious purpose of worldwide mercy and salvation for all peoples.

Think of how often a child looks at their parent and constantly asks that question, why? Why do I have to do that? Homework, piano practice, chores in the house, whatever.

Why did you have to do that to me? A punishment perhaps, when they do wrong. Why can't I do that? Be like Jenny or John, whose mum and dad let them do whatever they want.

[40 : 17] It's not fair. I wish you weren't my parents. It's not fair. But roll the clock forward about 20 years. don't you look back and give thanks for all that those loving parents did for you, for their patience, their merciful patience, even in the punishments that brought you up to adulthood and the

security of a loving home.

And would your parents themselves also tell you how their hearts often ached and were pained far more than yours when they were having to punish you just because they loved you so much and their purpose for your future was so precious to them that they could be patient.

And what if God, who is rich in mercy, is willing to lay himself open to such misunderstanding and insults and even anger just because his purpose of mercy is so vast for his precious ones and so wonderful.

But he will endure even heartaches and heartbreaks of defiant enemies and disobedience of apostates among his own people who publicly profess his name but are far from him.

What if that is still what God is doing in this world? In the first century, in Paul's time, even though the Jewish people rejected such privilege, or in the 21st century, for even the people of Christendom rejects such a rich heritage of privilege.

[41 : 59] And yet, in that, and even through that, God's abundant mercy is superabounding and overflowing to the whole wide world.

What if that is what God were doing? Well, says Paul, that is precisely what the scriptures promised that God would do.

Hosea, verse 25, spoke of those who are not God's people, Gentile outsiders being last, last called, notice the word, to be his beloved people, called to be sons of the living God.

God's extravagant mercy. As chapter 4 says, giving life to the dead, calling into being things that are not to make them things that are.

But also look at verse 27. Not only extravagant mercy for the world, but enduring mercy for the remnant of Israel who will be saved.

[43 : 03] God will judge his people, and he has judged his people, but a remnant of them will be saved. They will not be wiped off this earth like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Not a Hitler, not a Stalin, not an Al-Qaeda, not anybody will ever wipe off this earth the remnant of believing Jewish people, brothers and sisters in Christ.

And in all those who are called, Jews and Gentiles are complete, and Jesus himself comes. Has God's promise failed? Has his gospel failed?

Has it failed in the West today? Has it failed in Scotland today? Does the state of the present day Church of Scotland and Church of England and other mainline denominations, does it mean God's word has failed?

Sometimes I have to confess in my heart, I say to myself, it must have, surely. Especially in the grim days that we face at the moment. But friends, Romans chapter 9 tells me I'm wrong.

[44 : 13] God's promise never fails, never has failed, is not failing now, and never will fail. Because it is a certain sovereign, covenant word that will never return to him void.

three things very briefly just to conclude. Because his pattern is unchanging, and he saves through his sovereign elect and call, then if we understand sovereign grace truly, then we also will be people like Paul.

We'll both rejoice with adoration at the riches of his glory that are ours as vessels of mercy, but we'll also, like Paul, weep in agony for those who remain in the present time as vessels of wrath, cut off from God's mercy in Christ.

Paul's Calvinism, if I can put it that way, weeps for the lost. And as we'll see in chapter 10 and 11, labours in prayer and in evangelism for the lost.

to understand the great doctrines of grace never, ever, leads to shallow complacency, only to deep, deep compassion.

[45 : 33] Second, because God's plan is unchallenged either by defiance from without or by disobedience within his church, these things cannot hinder, but in fact can only further God's extravagant mercy in this world.

And that's so important for us to remember. When the CIM missionaries were all thrown out of China in 1949 after Mao's revolution, people despaired, but it did not stop God's purpose, his merciful purpose for China.

Indeed, it flourished. And the church in China and all through Southeast Asia is far, far greater today than it ever was then. So if our Western church is weakened and losing the gospel today, will it hinder God's plan?

It will not. It will serve God's abundant, overflowing mercy as the gospel goes out to the whole world, the teeming billions of the South and the East. And if the church of Scotland, our denomination, self-destructs in a crisis of disbelief and disobedience, God's mercy will not be stopped.

And it will be served and increased abundantly. thirdly and lastly, because God's purpose is universal, to show his mercy to all peoples, for all nations, and because he's a God of extraordinary patience, who endures with much patience, even those who disobey him, even those who have been defying him.

[47 : 10] because his desire is to show mercy and compassion and share the rich glory of his love, even with recalcitrant enemies.

Friends, that means there's still time. there's still time for you to bow the knee and to find that mercy. Whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, whether you're from Glasgow, or China, or India, or Timbuktu, whether you've known the Bible all your life and have been brought up with it with your mother's milk, or whether today is the first time you've ever heard anything about the Christian gospel in your whole life.

Because he is patient, not wishing that any should perish, he's a God who's still calling. Calling people to the obedience of faith.

Calling people to belong to Jesus Christ. Calling those who are not his people, to be his people, to be beloved, to be sons and daughters of the living God.

And friend, if you answer that call today, let me encourage you to answer that call. You'll find a merciful God.

[48 : 36] And you'll find a God whose promise will never, ever, ever fail. Amen.

Let's pray. Lord, how we thank you that you are a sovereign God, a God of mercy, a God of grace. open our eyes, we pray, that we may see you and know you and trust you forever. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen. Amen.