

# Gods Plan of Salvation - A Mystery

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 June 2021

Preacher: Malcolm Macdonald

[ 0 : 00 ] Psalm 86 and the last two verses of the psalm in garlic Psalm 86 and the last two verses of the psalm in garlic Psalm 86 and the last two verses of the psalm in garlic

Psalm 86 and the last two verses of the psalm in garlic Psalm 86 and the last two verses of the psalm in garlic Psalm 86 and the last two verses of the psalm in garlic Psalm 86 and the last two verses of the psalm in garlic Psalm 86 and the last two verses of the psalm in garlic Psalm 86 and the last two verses of the psalm in garlic

Psalm 86 and the last two verses of the psalm in garlic Psalm 86 and the last two verses of the psalm in garlic Psalm 86 and the last two verses of the psalm in garlic Psalm 86 and the last two verses of the psalm in garlic theoretical salted On paper and the last two turn i'll go ahead and give rise to psalm in 95 and pray today And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for hitherto you were not able to bear it. Neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal, for whereas there is among you envy, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?

[ 4 : 36 ] Even as the Lord gave to every man. I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.

Now he that planteth, and he that watereth, are one. And every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God. He are God's husbandry. He are God's building.

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon.

But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest.

[ 5 : 49 ] For the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire. And the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.

Know ye not that ye are this temple of the Lord, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.

For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, for it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again the Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.

[ 6 : 59 ] Therefore let no man glory in men, for all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas of the world, or life or death, or things present or things to come.

All are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's. In the name of God, may God add his blessing to the reading of that word, and to his name be the praise.

Lord, we pray that you would encourage us through your word, as we have been reminded your word is truth.

And those who have a measure of understanding of it as the word of truth, are those that you have imbued with the spirit of truth.

May we be numbered amongst them, that we may know, in our own heart and mind and soul, that you have done a work in us. And that, where that work has begun, you will continue it until the day of Christ Jesus.

[ 8 : 18 ] We bring before you all our cares and concerns at this time of worship. We pray that you would bless our being together, remembering those who are unable to be present for whatever reason.

We remember the congregation as a whole, and we pray for all who are in part of it. We ask that you would bless every home and family, and in particular, the homes that may be concerned for loved ones.

And there are many amongst us who may be numbered amongst such. Those who pray for themselves, we give thanks that you have given to them a spirit of prayer.

Those who do not, we give thanks for the privilege of being able to pray for them. And we pray that you would encourage such endeavour on the part of your people, that you have made a praying people for yourself.

Remember the congregations of our presbytery. We pray for the ministries that are going on at the present, and for the congregations that are without a minister.

[ 9 : 30 ] We think of Carlow, who are anticipating to have a minister set over them shortly. And we pray for the congregation of Bach, who will be meeting again shortly to take steps in order to fulfil that vacancy.

Remember the students who have completed their studies in the college, in the seminary, and as they wait upon your own guiding hand to be upon them.

We would pray that you would make yourself known to them as the one who has called them into such a labour, and that you would confer in them in their calling by bringing congregations to focus upon them, to undertake a ministry amongst them.

Bless the preaching of the word and all you have sent out with it in this cynic world, and we are mindful of the needs that are so great in this day that has overtaken us, where there are many still succumbing to the after-effects of the pandemic, although in a sense we, as a nation, are seeing an improvement in the health and well-being of the nation, yet there are still others who are succumbing to it.

And for any who are gravely ill because of it, we pray that you would minister to them through the hands of those appointed to that end. We pray for our nation as a whole, and we pray forgiveness for the way that we are guilty of dereliction of duty with regard to our God.

[ 11 : 19 ] Remember the government of the day, whether it be in Scotland or in the UK. We pray for our council and all who serve on the council, and we pray for all who would endeavour to uphold them in the path of duty.

So here are petitions as we turn to your word, bless it to us, as we think of what you have to say to us in this passage that we are to look at.

Watch over as each one. Cleanse from sin in Jesus' name we would ask it. Amen. We're going to turn to Paul's epistle to the Ephesians.

And chapter 1. We're going to read that. Verse 8. Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth.

As we continue our study in this passage, we're aware of the opening words of the apostle, where we've seen what is commonly called a doxology of praise.

[ 13 : 21 ] And while the subject matter may appear to us to be a deeply mysterious topic, if you're talking about God, what else could it be but mysterious?

I think I was reading someone who was saying that that people did God at his service if they thought that they were able to understand everything that there was to be understood about God.

as if they were more or less saying to God, well, if we can't understand this, then we're not prepared to accept what you're saying.

As if whether he was saying the truth, speaking the truth about his own activities or not, depended on their being able to understand what was true of him.

And here the apostle is clearly comfortable with words that are mysterious.

[ 14 : 45 ] And that comfort comes from appreciating the fact that it is the almighty of which he is speaking.

and it's his greatness that calls forth from the apostle such an outpouring of thankfulness which we find at the beginning.

John's dot describes the path that Paul is leading the reader on that's beginning in eternity as we saw.

that comes from the past with election into the present with adoption and then finally the future blessing which we have before us here of unification with Christ.

And I when I was looking at this passage I came across a statement by I think he was an Irish Presbyterian minister and he was speaking at the Keswick convention and though he spoke over 40 years ago I think what he said is still true in our own day.

[ 16 : 08 ] He said the the epistle stresses the sovereignty of God in our salvation and is thus a corrective to the experience-centered Christianity which is so prevalent.

It stresses the centrality of the Church in the purposes of God and thus offsets the chronic individualism which is so often a feature of evangelical life.

Thirdly it insists on the necessity for a life of holiness and thus challenges the law standards and moral flabbiness with which so many Christian people seem to live their lives in the present.

Now looking at the passage before us there are three things we can look at from the verses that we're looking at here.

We saw part of it last week when we looked at verse 7 but the first thing we can highlight today is that God has a plan.

[ 17 : 24 ] That's the most obvious thing God has a plan. The second thing is that that plan is a plan that he has chosen to make known.

He's not kept that plan hidden and it's a plan that he has brought to light. And the third thing is that he again returns to the in him relationship which we had at the initial stage in the chapter.

He has already established that this exists and he declares that this is the ultimate aim and end of the in Christ relationship that he might declare it and gather to himself a people who will who will glorify him.

He will be the one who will as he puts it himself in verse 10 there he might gather together in one all things in Christ both which are in heaven and which are on earth even in him.

So that's the ultimate end of what he is about to do. Now God has a plan and the Christian already knows this.

[ 18 : 53 ] I would suspect that most Christians understand that as sovereign their God has a purpose their God knows what he's doing.

There are many in the world who are oblivious to that fact and for the Christian providence is all important and providence would be meaningless unless God had a plan.

It's difficult for many in the world to see rhyme or reason in a lot of things that happen in the world. And it must be said that for the Christian it is problematic at times although they believe that God has a plan and that God is sovereign and that he is overruling all that goes on in it.

There are occasions and experiences that they have that they find inexplicable. And the world may be stoical and they will have a stance grin and bear it because that's all they can do.

But the Christian may at times be stoical and at that moment of stoicism of inability to change the events that have come about they or we whoever it is may find ourselves questioning perhaps or at odds with what God is doing for whatever reason.

[ 20 : 44 ] but at some point we will come back to this touchstone that God is in this in whatever way.

Take for example the current situation of the pandemic it is clearly the case that somebody is to blame for it.

and we're still finding that today that you know in the news just recently you find the Americans trying to pin the blame on China for this virus that it's a man made virus and somebody is to blame and it's clearly somebody that they can point the finger at and if it's not pointing the finger at the originator of the virus and finding the origin of it within men then there's something arising out of it that we have to spend our time trying to sort out.

for example a lot of the energy of politicians is spent trying to sort out in their mind or in their strategy of how to deal with it how did this come about how did we react to it did we react to it quickly enough was our reaction appropriate enough are we doing enough to bring us out of it and so on and all the energy is devoted to what we are doing and what our fellow men are doing but surely for the Christian at least they at some point must come to God and say well this is part of God's plan we might not have an explanation for what God is doing we might not go to a passage of scripture that says to us

God is working in this way through this but at least we can confidently assert that whatever it is and whenever God will choose to disclose it it forms part of the greater good for all who are his now that's not what Paul is talking about here obviously although when we're talking about a plan we can't separate anything from what God is doing because everything is included in it there's nothing in our lives that God is not in one way or another but in this particular passage Paul is not concerned about a pandemic he has something more important to speak about and the context tells us that he is after all speaking about or talking about the redemptive purposes of God we saw that last week he is saying here that

[ 24 : 26 ] God has made known the mystery of his will and what theologians call the secret purposes of God God has a plan and through the gospel it is to be revealed that is the main source of revelation through the gospel and his purposes in bringing to salvation fallen man are revealed to us in the gospel in the word of God that presents the gospel to us the apostle if you remember writes in his epistle to the Romans all the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out for who has known he says the mind of the

Lord or who has been his own counselor and so on so Paul never gets away from this he understands that God's ways are mysterious and God's ways are difficult to understand but at the heart of what he is doing he has the salvation of sinners in mind and through the gospel that purpose that he has for the salvation of sinners is made known having made known to us he says the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he had purpose in himself and that's clearly he brings back to the doctrine of election there if you want to find a reason why any sinner is saved you can't find it in yourself you have to find it in

God and that is where he finds reason for the salvation of any sinner whoever that sinner may be and we've seen here that God from all eternity before the world was and you know when you go back into eternity you can't look at yourself and say well it's because of me or because of anything I've done that God has chosen to intervene in my life in a saving way that's not the way it is if you are going to build something then you lay a foundation and that is what Paul is saying here he's telling us that the foundation was laid by God and the building erected upon the foundation was erected by God it's stated there that it was most wise and holy it was found in the counsel of his will we can't delve into that we can't plumb the depths of that it is beyond us and beyond our capacity to understand it but he has said this is where election comes from this is where the purposes that

I'm disclosing to you in the gospel come from in the confession and his commentary and Robert Shaw states that God as an intelligent being is one who knows and judges who purposes ends and devices mean who acts from design conceives a plan and then proceeds to execute it now in the next few verses Paul is going to return to this in verse 11 in more detail but it is so important for him to make known to us and to all who hear his gospel and who read this epistle that this is heard this is understood in some way in a very detailed commentary that Martin Lloyd-Jones has on this epistle he speaks about how well in the original

Greek in verse 8 he says wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence that the translation in the authorised version there is slightly misleading because the emphasis in that translation falls upon the passion of God rather than those who are saved those who are elect those who experience his grace and without spending too much time on that we are to understand the purposes of God in this specific way will result in the salvation of his own people and because it is in the will of God it can't be changed because it is his purposes they are not going to be subverted by any individual he will bring to fruition what he has purposed and surely when we think of it like that we are encouraged by it if it was down to ourselves what we do or don't do then our salvation would be jeopardised but if we remember that it goes back into eternity and

[ 30 : 34 ] God has purposed it there and his purposes are carried out in time and the overarched time into eternity again now God has made his will known through type and symbol as you understand in the Old Testament the types point towards how the salvation of sinners is going to be accomplished through the passion of his son Jesus Christ through prophecy and if we want encouragement you look very closely at the prophecies and those that have been fulfilled there's nothing that God has said concerning his act or his actions that have not been realised except those that are still to be fulfilled and if you want to be encouraged by just look at every one of these and the prophecies would not have been possible were they not already indelibly imprinted in the will of

God and he has declared that so whatsoever whatever is going to come to pass God has made it known through the gospel in order to encourage in order to strengthen those who will believe in him when their faith is challenged and there's nothing that will prevent it now the third thing we have here is accompanying this he says in whom we have obtained an inheritance being predestinated according to the purpose of him that's verse 11 but he's looking forward with the same certainty to to see realized in the same way what has previously been realized in the life and the death of his son Greek scholars tell us that the sentence structure

I've already mentioned how the whole area of study that we have here from verse 3 to verse 14 is one long sentence and some of it is quite difficult to interpret because of the complex sentence structure but what he is telling us is that God is going to bring to fruition his purposes in this way he's going to gather in one all things in Christ on earth and in heaven even in him and that is something that itself is if you're thinking about the greatness of God or the vastness of

God you can see it in the design that God has in the salvation of sinners that there is nothing that is left to chance and it over arches time and it you know it goes into eternity in one direction and into eternity in the other direction we can well looking at it from a personal point of view if I put it like this I can only imagine that the apostle envisages a time or a day or an hour when everything and all things will be subservient to Christ and the reason for that is attributed to the redemptive work of

Christ Hugh Martin has got a very interesting study on on the whole of the eschatology if you like of Christ and he takes us beyond time and sense and this is what he writes our entire salvation belongs to a world or realm or sphere above time and sense a realm such as that whosoever lives in it has life eternal he has no more he is no more a child or a denison or occupant of time like the king of that realm who was dead and is alive again and behold he lives forever more now what Hugh Martin is saying there is that it's all to do with the in

[ 35 : 50 ] Christ relationship just the same as when Christ came into the world he came into the world the son of God and became man and when he became man he was within the sphere and the regulatory influences of time for a time and Jesus has descended from above you know how it describes to us his descent into the world and at the end of his redemptive work he ascended back into glory that was declared that was important for the message of the gospel that this be stated it wasn't there was nothing there were no loose strings there were no no areas that that

God did not expose to our our research if you like he instructed he revealed he taught that this was what was to happen there is no point in saying that Paul is what Paul is stating is simple fear because it isn't there is great difficulty in what he is saying there is a mystery connected to it and the word mystery is different to the way that we would use it because in Greek I think a mystery is something that is revealed it is something that was hidden that is now revealed it's not mysterious anymore Paul has spoken of it as a mystery because the gospel is what was hidden now declared and in many respects what is declared is not mysterious in the way we understand it but what

God is doing nevertheless is remember we studied recently the high priestly prayer of Christ and Christ in that prayer petitioned his father in John 17 and verse 24 he says father I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me for you loved me before the foundation of the world so Christ himself is praying for something but at the same time he is anticipating the thing that he is praying for that those that he has loved that God gave to him will be with him where he is where he has returned to God and this is what God has purposed for the redeemed God having out of his mere good pleasure elected some to everlasting life the shorter catechism says and

Dr. Lloyd Jones says that there is an omission in the translation which we have here which overlooks the restoration as a in the sense of it being a free unification it is in the English that we have here that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ both which are in heaven and which are on earth that it is slightly overlooked that what is being done by Christ is to restore what sin has damaged what sin has spoiled when we think of the words of Hugh Martin his focus is on this great mystery the restoration of the harmony that existed before sin entered into the world and it's a harmony that is going to be in heaven and a harmony that every soul that has enjoyed redemption at the hand of

Christ will enjoy I'll finish with a quote from Hugh Martin in the passion of Christ God and man meet and are at one all of man that shall not be reprobate forever in the day of Christ eternity and time meet all of time that shall not be cast away the passion of Christ is the head of the body the day of Christ is the fullness of these times bear in mind that Hugh Martin was a theologian of great ability but delving into what God has done in the salvation of sinners in Christ there's nothing to be lost by it there's great gain to be had in the study of it however much we are able to understand of

[ 41 : 22 ] God's doing well we pray that God would bless to us these very few thoughts well before we turn to the if you can so you