

PM Romans 11:25-12:2 "Who has given a gift to Him, that He might be repaid?"

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[0 : 00] Verse 25. Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers.

A partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written.

The Deliverer will come from Zion, and he will banish ungodliness from Jacob. And this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins. As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake.

But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God, but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you, they also may now receive mercy.

For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!

[1 : 21] How unsearchable are his judgments! And how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?

Or 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. I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing, you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

And let's leave our reading there. Now I heard, just as I was coming in, that we don't normally have a children's talk at the evening sing again.

[2 : 36] We're singing to Romans, and Romans chapter 11. Our text tonight comes from verse 35 of Romans chapter 11, which says, Or who has given a gift to him, that he might be repaid?

But one of the disadvantages of being in a situation where you are having supply preaching is that we don't have consecutive preaching.

We don't have preaching which goes from one verse to the next to the next in order to get consistent teaching from passages of the Bible like Romans.

And the problem with that is that we don't get a good sense of the context. Where is this verse set? We can't just come to it cold.

We need to spend time understanding what this verse is saying and what has gone before it and what comes after it. And as I was saying to the younger people, Romans is a glorious, glorious book.

[4 : 02] I'm sure you agree with me about that. It's the best and fullest explanation of how God's plan of redemption works.

The gospel of God, the gospel of Jesus Christ is explained in the most detail in this book. All that has gone before feeds into it in a way.

Everything in the Old Testament looking forward to the coming of Christ. Everything in the gospels, the detail of how Christ fulfills all of these prophecies.

And then Romans comes and gives us this glorious statement of doctrine, of Christian doctrine.

And if some of you have maybe studied Romans before, you might know that at the end of chapter 11 and the beginning of chapter 12, there's a, most people agree, there's a change in emphasis. [5 : 08] We've had 11 chapters of doctrine. 11 chapters explaining how the gospel works primarily. And from chapter 12 onwards, the emphasis is on the practical outworking of that doctrine.

What does it mean for us now? If we understand the gospel, how does it change our lives? How does it change how we live? And in between the section about the doctrine and the section about the practical implications for our lives, we have what is called the doxology, which is these verses that we read from verse 33 to verse 36.

And Paul comes to the end of all of this doctrine that he's been explaining to us and bursts out into worship and praise.

He can't help himself in a sense. And in order to get a flavour as to why Paul bursts out into worship like this, I want us to spend maybe a little bit longer than we perhaps usually would in setting the context of this verse by doing a kind of a run through of how did we get to chapter 11.

Back in the beginning of the letter of Romans in chapter 1 Paul explains that he's going to tell us about the gospel of God concerning his son.

[6 : 54] It's about Jesus. righteousness. And he explains that this gospel is about righteousness. The righteousness of God.

And it's a righteousness which Paul tells us comes by faith. He'll explain more about that and what that means as he goes through the letter.

But first of all we need to understand why do we need righteousness? And in chapters 2 and 3 Paul explains that the wrath of God God is angry about the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men.

And that is a hard thing for non-Christian people to understand. But Paul takes time in chapters 2 and 3 to explain that whether you are a Jew or a Gentile whether you are a respectable clean living good moral person or whether you are an obvious criminal sinner you're in the same position as regards your own righteousness.

righteousness. Because famously as he tells us in chapter 3 all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

[8 : 32] And unless we have the Holy Spirit enlightening our hearts we will reject that message. but Paul is at pains to tell us that this is a righteousness which comes by faith.

And that immediately raises a question is this something new? Is this something different? Is God doing something new in the New Testament? And no says Paul in chapter 4 he explains the example of Abraham.

Abraham is saved by faith. He explains that he is not saved by performing certain rituals and he is not saved by obeying certain rules.

He is saved by faith. It has always been that way. And in chapter 5 he explains that this is the case for everyone. Not just Abraham but everybody is saved on that basis.

That while we were still sinners Christ died for us. And if you have understood that argument if you have been following it as it goes along it raises a question anyone who is really grappling with this really trying to understand it will say well that is okay but then what is the point of being good?

[10 : 00] Is there any merit? Is there any reason to try to live a righteous and a holy life? And he addresses that point in chapter 6.

And he explains that yes absolutely it matters it matters more now than it did before because we have a new reason to live righteous and holy lives.

however and this is where I love Romans so much because it follows all of the answers all the questions that you'll have if you're understanding it as you go along so you say right well that means we must live holy lives it's more important than ever for us to be holy and righteous and good and we look in on our own hearts and we see that we still struggle with sin and Paul addresses this in chapter 7 of Romans he explains that yes normal the normal sincere Christian even the apostle Paul himself struggles with indwelling sin we'll end up still committing sins we'll still need to repent and Paul ties this all together in probably the most famous chapter in Romans in Romans chapter 8 this is really the heart of the letter to the Romans it is a chapter which would be an excellent choice if you were going to memorise a chapter in the Bible it explains that through union with Christ we now have a new status there's no condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus we are more than conquerors now because of what Christ has done and then from chapters 9 and 10 and into 11 Paul addresses something that most Christians struggle with and it's

kind of the advanced level class if you like but he's dealing with the question of God's sovereignty if God is sovereign if

God is in control of everything that happens then how can this how does this work for us and he uses the example of the nation of Israel and explains that God is just and we are responsible for our actions but God is sovereign and it's a great mystery and these chapters help us understand something of that mystery but it's one that we are called to accept with childlike faith and so that's a summary of how we got to chapter 11 we have this this new new status through Christ which is unassailable we have perfect confidence because our confidence and our faith does not rest on our efforts but on the efforts of Christ and this brings Paul to burst out in worship just as he draws that section to a close and I want us this evening to focus on verse 35 but I'll read the whole doxology again oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways for who has known the mind of the

[14 : 06] Lord or who has been his counselor or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid let's look at these verses more closely then as we focus our attention on verse 35 I want us to notice something here of God's riches something here about God's mercy and lastly we'll consider God's repayment God's riches who has given a gift to him what is this verse actually saying well whenever we come to study a verse like this there's always the help and I think some of you may have this even in your pew Bibles you'll have cross references those who have gone through the

Bible and have helpfully noticed and drawn our attention to places where there are quotations from other parts of the Bible helping us to draw it all together and there's a general rule for anyone studying the Bible that light on a particular verse is often shone from other parts of the Bible the Bible shines light on itself in order to illuminate our minds illuminate our hearts and you'll see in the cross references who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid it seems to be a quote or at least an allusion from Job chapter 41 verse 11 where God himself asks who has first given to me that I should repay him whatever is under the whole heaven is mine there's a similar verse earlier in the book of Job in verse chapter 35 verse 7 where young

Elihu asks a similar question he says if you are righteous what do you give to him what do you give to God or what does he receive from your hand do you see the point that's been made in these verses there's a whole host of similar verses throughout the Old Testament making the same kind of point God's riches are inexhaustible he does not need to be given anything by us and so we can think of verses like Psalm 50 verse 12 which says the cattle on a thousand hills are mine which is a poetic way of expressing the point that we live in God's world God owns the world God owns everything in the world he created the world and in fact this world and this planet are just a small part of God's riches it's a while of the devil that

Satan would have us believe that the world is for our own private pleasure that parts of it can be owned privately in that sense and anyone who is looking for satisfaction looking for ultimate purpose in the things of this world will be disappointed because they belong to God everything in this world is God's and of course there's a grain of truth in the suggestion from Satan that happiness happiness can be found in things in the things that God has created because God has made a good world full of good gifts for us to enjoy for us to appreciate but they're to be accepted on the understanding that they are part of

God's world there's a danger for us that we think that we can enrich God by giving something back to him that is already his now this idea is utterly abhorrent to a non-Christian person the non-Christian person feels certain that they have something that God needs or God wants if he exists at all and we need to guard against that kind of thinking creeping into our own hearts because we're surrounded by people who sneer at the idea that God made the world who sneer at the idea that God could in any way be even exist never mind have created and own the world and that God would have any hold over us is something that is rejected out of hand there's a danger that we're influenced by these kind of wrong thoughts and we need to guard against that danger by doing what we're doing tonight gathering together as God's people and speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs reminding each other that we live in

[20 : 06] God's world and that God cannot be enriched by anything that we do a person who's been enlightened by the Holy Spirit and has been enabled to read these first 11 chapters of Romans and to respond to them and understand them rightly will be amazed and they'll like Paul they'll be moved to break out into worship because the fact that we live in God's world the fact that

our God the God that we worship the God that we belong to can never be impoverished by anything that anyone else would do is a reason for us to rejoice and celebrate who has ever given to God that God should repay him the God we worship is all sufficient the theologians have a shorthand word for that it's

God's aseity our God is not dependent on anyone or anything nothing about God can ever be diminished by anything that we do and this gives a true Christian a reason to rejoice and a reason to worship and so that's something of God's riches but what about I said we would speak of God's mercy why is this verse in the format of a question who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid we need to look at the context of this verse a little bit more carefully to understand why that's a question because as we've been saying it's an outworking of God's aseity that nobody can enrich him and this in turn influences

God's wisdom his fairness if you like God has arranged things in such a way through what we call the administration of grace that nobody can buy their way to heaven and that's a good news for us good news for those of us who are not multi millionaires I mean it seems silly doesn't it when you say it like that but that's the truth of it God has arranged things in such a way that everybody comes to him on the same basis God has consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all that's what triggers this outpouring of worship the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God if you're a sinner like me you'll understand why that's important that we all come on the basis of undeserved favour grace not merit there's a similar verse in 1st

Corinthians 4 verse 7 the apostle Paul asks the Corinthian church what do you have that you did not receive it's similar the context is a bit different in Corinthians it's not an outpouring of worship Paul's actually admonishing the Corinthian church because they were showing a tendency to try to go beyond the gospel message and in so doing we're undermining its key foundational truth nobody can give anything to God we all come to God on the basis of grace on the basis of his mercy alone who has ever given to God that God should repay him the expected answer of course is no one nothing can be given to him and

I believe it's in the format of a question this verse because especially when we come before God in worship we have a tendency a human tendency to think that we're bringing something that enriches God we have a tendency to forget that the gospel the glory of the gospel is that it is all of grace it's nothing intrinsic to us we didn't become Christians because we made a smart decision we certainly don't stay as Christians because we've got a great ability to pay back God to give him some gift that makes him somehow indebted to us the gospel of God is God's initiative from beginning to end it's by faith from first to last that's what the righteousness of

[25 : 53] God that this book is all about and this excludes boasting because it is a gift and the fact that it's a gift means that it's a stumbling block for many non Christian people because it's our default position to believe that by being good we can somehow earn our way to heaven and as Christians we often have the same we imbibe that same idea we think that by some extravagant sacrifice of money or effort or time or something that we gave up is somehow enriching God but we cannot repay God it's all of mercy all of grace and yet sometimes there is a danger that the wrong person hears the wrong part of the message it can be like that sometimes a couple of months ago

I was at an induction at Downvale Free Church in Glasgow there was an assistant minister being inducted and the tradition and induction is that an older wiser minister is given the job of giving what's called the charge to the minister and another old wise minister is given the job of giving the charge to the congregation and the charge to the minister will traditionally be an address telling that new minister that he needs to be consistent he needs to be careful about his personal holiness he needs to be diligent in preparing diligent in getting round and looking after the spiritual needs of that congregation and the charge to the congregation is traditionally words to the effect that the congregation need to be faithful supportive and caring of the minister and

I can't remember which way round it was but it was the Reverend Douglas Cranston came to deliver one of these charges and he made the point that quite often when the charge is given to the minister it's usually the congregation who tune in the most they listen and they say oh I hope I hope that the new minister is hearing all this stuff about how diligent he needs to be and how forgiving he needs to be of his congregation and so on and then when the charge is given to the congregation it's usually the minister that's dialing in he's thinking oh I hope I hope the congregation are getting all this that they will be supportive and forgiving of me and so on sometimes sometimes it's a wee bit like that I fear when the gospel is presented there can be people who hear all about the grace

and mercy of God but they hear about it in a blinkered way they're not really paying attention they're not really dialed into it they think that it's something for someone else and so there could be somebody who has perhaps a habitual sin in their life but it doesn't hardly register they don't feel any great need of repentance and they'll have a casual disregard for big chunks of this letter because all they hear when they're sitting hearing the gospel being proclaimed is mercy love forgiveness no problem there's even a German poet who's been quoted as saying of course God will forgive me that's his job well these are quite chilling and wrong thoughts because the truth is that in a very real sense there is a need to repay

God so we've considered something of God's riches and we've considered something of his mercy but lastly and more solemnly perhaps let's consider the need for God's repayment I love these verses from Psalm 49 I'll read you to a couple of stanzas 7 to 9 of Psalm 49 there is no one who is able to redeem a soul from death none can pay to God the ransom to prolong another's breath to redeem a life is costly none sufficient price can pay so that one should live immortal free forever from decay our text says who has ever given a gift to him that he might be repaid

I'm told by those who study Greek that the word repaid or the word given a gift is more like who has first given a gift if there's anyone here using the old King James you'll see it's got that rendering who has first given something like that first given or pre-given the idea is of somehow being in a position to call in a favour from God could God ever be in our debt could we ever be in a position where we could call in a favour from God the idea is ridiculous if you've been following what I've been saying about God's riches it's so wrong as to be silly there's no possibility of us being in credit with God there's no way we could ever call in a favour from God because of something we've done some gift we've given him and yet there is a need for us to give something to God because in fact we have an awful and crippling debt we are spiritually bankrupt and so as that psalm that

[33 : 24] I read to you points out there's a need to be redeemed there's a cost that needs to be born and unless and until we see that there is a huge cost to be born then I don't think we can be real Christians Paul will tell the Corinthian Christians in 1 Corinthians 6 that they were bought with a price and in 1 Peter 1 19 we read that the ransom that's been paid of course is the precious blood of Christ we don't have time tonight to explore that in more detail but I hope you know already that we can't even scratch the surface of the topic of the costliness of what our great king Jesus our high priest has offered in order to obtain forgiveness for us and so in a wonderful sense this verse has a kind of a double meaning at one level there's a sort of a surface meaning to this verse who's given a gift to him that he might be repaid the expected answer is nobody nobody's given a gift to God no one would ever be able to do that and yet because of the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God because his judgments are truly inscrutable and his paths beyond tracing out whilst that remains a true answer that nobody is the answer but one and the same time through the mystery of the

Trinity there is one the one and only son beloved of the father who has first given salvation to God who has created that indebtedness in order that he in turn can ask ask of me and I'll give you the nations as your inheritance and so if we read verse 36 in that way it takes on a new shade of meaning we're not wrong to read it and think that the answer expected answer is no one and that then the verse that follows from him through him to him is really saying from God through God to God but we can also read this verse as referencing our Lord Jesus Christ he is the one who has first given he first gave to God in order that

God would repay him he's offered himself as a perfect sacrifice as Hebrews will explain in detail and so if we read it in that way verse 36 then becomes about the Lord Jesus Christ for from the Lord Jesus Christ and through the Lord Jesus Christ and to the Lord Jesus Christ are all things and that I hope maybe reminds you of some other verses like Colossians 1 16 where we're reminded that all things have been created by him and are for him and through him and so these are deep verses indeed because they give us insight into this the reasons behind this outpouring of worship but we're reminded by these verses of the constant danger that we face of losing sight of God's grace Paul has literally taken 11 chapters to emphasize and explain as clearly as he possibly can that it is all of grace that's the general theme of these first 11 chapters a righteousness which comes by faith not by works so no one can boast and we need at the start of this year to be absolutely rooted in this foundational gospel truth we're always in danger of forgetting it nothing we ever do will create any indebtedness on God's part everything in the world is already his and this should move us to worship but how much more are we moved to worship when we consider that

the Lord Jesus Christ is the one who first has first given he's offered himself as an infinitely valuable holy perfect sacrifice he's exchanged himself as a ransom for sinful people like you and me what are the applications of this for us where we read on into chapter 12 and here we see that all of our lives are to be devoted to him in worship in a way that is sacrificial what does this mean for us then well surely if we've grasped this we cannot be casual or light in our attitude to our own personal holiness surely we can't be mean spirited when it comes to giving for the financial work of the church remembering that God is no one's debtor but most of all I want us to be on our guard against ever thinking that somehow God is obliged to repay us let us never forget that this gospel of grace this hope this righteousness that comes by faith is by faith from first to last Amen may God bless these thoughts to us we're going to close by singing the glorious words of the Scottish Psalter version of Psalm 116