

The Jews and the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Welcome to another Sermon on the Web from St. John's Shaughnessy Anglican Church in Vancouver, Canada. You are free to use this mp3 audio file and to redistribute it to others without alteration and without charge. After the sermon, listen for more information about St. John's Shaughnessy Church and the St. John's website. The following message is from the February 11, 2001 service at St. John's Shaughnessy. Dr. J.I. Packer delivered his message from the book of Romans chapters 9 through 11. The title of the message is The Jews and the Gospel.

Paul. I'm going to, as it were, swing a searchlight. I'm going to train my searchlight on Paul, on Paul's God, on the Roman Christians, Paul's first readers, and finally on ourselves.

And, as you will soon see, everything that I'm going to say as I manipulate my searchlight comes straight out of the passage. I didn't invent Christianity. I read what is written and seek to learn what the Word of God says. If some of the things that we're going to see seem to us, hard and breathtaking to believe, well, please remember, it's God who says these things through Paul, and you mustn't blame Packer as if any of it was his idea, because it isn't.

I ask you, before we plunge in, to put out of your minds an idea that is very commonly heard. And, preachers, expositors, lecturers say this over and over again, they say that Romans 9 through 11 is a parenthesis in Paul's letter. Well, a parenthesis means something that you can bracket off, and something, indeed, which you can leave out, ignore, without loss. And these chapters are not, repeat, repeat, not a parenthesis in that sense. They're actually the climax of Paul's exposition of the greatness, of the greater grace of God, the exposition which he started right back at the beginning of the letter, and is being concerned with all along. Here, Paul shares, as we shall see, the deepest truth about the gospel, which is that God does everything for his own endless praise. And here also, he shares, very frankly, his deepest trouble regarding the gospel, namely the fact that people he loves don't believe it.

[3 : 39] There's a sense in which you come closer to Paul's heart in these chapters than we've come yet anywhere in this great letter.

And certainly, when I say this is the trouble that Paul shares with us, surely it strikes a chord in our hearts, because we too are distressed about people we love, who don't believe the good news of Jesus that we have believed, and that has brought us into glorious new life.

So, let's do what I have announced. Let us train our searchlight first on Paul, sharpen the focus, and watch him expressing his distress about the unbelief of his fellow Jews.

You see that in the first three verses of chapter 9, and also in the first three verses of chapter 10. I ask you, as we turn to read these, do you know how Paul felt as he expounded the glories of God's grace in chapters 1 through 8?

Well, these are the verses that tell us. There was joy, there was triumph, there was a sense of glory in his heart, and pain and grief as well, which he now opens very frankly to us.

[5 : 15] Let's just look at those verses. Chapter 9, verses 1 through 3. It says Paul, I'm speaking the truth in Christ, I'm not lying. My conscience bears me witness, and the Holy Spirit, that's a very emphatic way of saying, I want you to take seriously what I'm going to tell you about myself this moment.

I speak the truth in Christ, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race.

They ought to believe, and they don't believe, and it breaks my heart. This is Paul sharing with us the distress of the evangelist, the man who's been told to share the good news of Christ and finds that when he shares it with those for whom he cares most, it's rejected.

They throw it back in his face. And this isn't just Paul the evangelist in his official identity, let's put it that way. It's Paul the Christian, Paul the converted believer, who doesn't want to go to heaven alone.

He wants to share Christ with his nearest and dearest, so that they may all go to heaven together. And what he's telling us here is that when he tries to do that, the word he speaks isn't received.

[7 : 05] And he says it's very painful to go through that experience. I heard only this morning about a guy, a Muslim, who studied at BCIT, who was brought to Christ during his time of study, who, when asked what he was going to do after his course was over, said straight away, I must go to Fiji, because my grandmother lives there, she's very old, and she needs to hear about Jesus.

Well, wonderful. I wonder, though, how his grandmother reacted when he got to Fiji and told her. We all of us, I think, have been here, and we find ourselves here again and again.

People we care for, relatives, friends, people we want to share Christ with, they won't have it. And it's distressing.

It hurts. Well, it hurt Paul. And here he is describing the hurt. I could wish, she says, that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, if only thereby I could bring them to faith.

But he's reasoning in these chapters about a situation where he's not able to do that, much as he wishes he could. If you look at the first three verses of chapter 10, you've got him expressing the same thought and telling us, what he didn't tell us at the beginning of chapter 9, what it is that his nearest and dearest, his fellow Jews, get wrong.

[8 : 54] Brethren, he says, verse 1, page 150, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

That's what I want to see happen. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God. Yes, they really do. But it's not enlightened. It's wrong-headed.

Look at verse 3. Being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, that's the good news of our justification through faith, about which Paul was beating the drum in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God and seeking to establish their own righteousness the way that people instinctively do.

This is our fallenness, you know. Our hearts are all twisted. When we think about pleasing God, we jump to the conclusion that if we pull up our socks and work hard, well, we shall please him and establish our position with him.

[10 : 05] And Paul, he remembers, spent the first two and a half chapters of Romans explaining that that's not possible. We are too bad in our hearts, too self-centered, too self-absorbed, too far from loving God with heart and mind and soul and strength and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

We can't do it. We're trying to establish our own righteousness because that's the thing we instinctively do, but it's impossible. And people have got to recognize that it's impossible, says Paul, and my Jewish brothers and sisters won't do that.

Being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, verse 3, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they didn't submit to God's righteousness.

Which means they didn't submit to Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. They didn't accept the invitation to trust him.

Deep down, they were saying, in response to Paul and others who preached the true gospel to them, we can get on without Jesus. We don't need him.

[11 : 33] Verse 4, Paul says, Christ is the end of the law that everyone who has faith may be justified. When he says end of the law, he pretty certainly means Christ is the one who puts closure to our attempt to establish ourselves with God by law-keeping.

Christ is the one who in doing that opens the door to accepting God's mercy and being brought into fellowship with God through faith in Jesus, God's Son, the Savior, the Mediator, the Lord.

Well, that is Paul telling us, very frankly, of his distress at the way that his Jewish confrères react to the gospel.

But yet, that isn't the only thing that he tells us in these three chapters. Along with his distress, his hurt, his pain, and his grief, he tells us of the delight that he has and that he believes all Christians will have in the praise of God for the grace that God has shown.

And that's actually what's happening in the two doxologies, the two outbursts of praise which are found in these chapters.

[13:09] At the beginning of chapter 9, you've got Paul breaking out in praise as he says, look now at verses 4 and 5, to the Israelites, he says, belong, then he goes through all the privileges that God declared in the Old Testament were given uniquely to the seed of Abraham.

They're Israelites and to them belongs the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs and of their race according to the flesh is the Christ.

And then, it's only in the margin that you find the correct translation of the next bit. Of their race according to the flesh is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever.

Amen. If you look at the footnote, footnote N, you'll see that that's given as a possible rendering, well, all the modern translations go for that as a certain rendering.

This is what Paul says about the Lord Jesus. He is God. Blessed forever. Amen. And when he says blessed forever, well, that's Paul, just for the moment, breaking out in praise.

[14:32] Bless the Lord. Whenever I think of him, I want to bless him. I want to thank him. I want to express adoration. He is wonderful and he is to be worshipped.

And then when you get to the end of chapter 11, he's back in what I call the doxology mode. You know that word, doxology?

It means praising and glorifying God. Look at verse 33. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are his judgments, how inscrutable his ways. And then verse 36. For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.

Amen. And that's Paul breaking out in his letter into the adoration in which he wants the Roman Christians to join him. Adoration for the wonderful things that God in his grace has done.

[15:37] So this is the delight of Paul the evangelist. Namely, to praise God. And the praise and joy of praising and the pain and distress at other people's unbelief.

These are two attitudes which live side by side in Paul's heart. When he thinks of his nearest and dearest who don't receive Christ, it brings him distress.

When he thinks of the greatness and the glory of the grace that God has shown in saving him and saving every other believer, well, he's immediately moved to adore and to praise.

And yes, that's actually rehearsal for heaven. That's what we shall be doing when we get to heaven for all eternity. And it will be our joy just as it was Paul's joy to be praising and adoring as he went along.

Well, as I said, this is something surely which we can identify with for we too have friends, relatives, people we care for to whom we've tried to witness and they have rejected what we've said.

[17:07] So that we have to think of them as outsiders now we long for them to become insiders but we can't avoid the verdict that at the moment they are outsiders, they're not in the kingdom, they're not in the life, they don't know the reality of the new life that we want to share with them.

So, we too with Paul I trust worship and adore but we too with Paul I trust feel the pain and the grief of non-response from the people to whom we seek to witness.

Now I swing my searchlight onto God himself. Paul in these chapters is telling us about God and he's telling us about God in a very God-centered way.

and you need to realize brothers and sisters that this is a shift of perspective from what we've been reading and learning in the first eight chapters of Romans where the perspective was not the God-centered perspective in a direct way, the perspective was the sinner-centered perspective and Paul started by showing us how much we need the new life the pardon and the change of heart that Christ brings and how glorious it is to have the new life that's chapters six and seven and eight but all the time the needy sinner that's you and that's me has been the central focus now however things change

Paul is unfolding what God is up to in a directly God-centered way he's expecting us to be interested in what God is up to in his world and he tells us very fully what God is doing about the fact that the Jews who had so much in the way of privilege don't for the most part accept the good news of Christ as yet so there's another question here the first question I asked as we went along was do you know how Paul felt and I trust that by now you do now I ask another question do you know how God is working do you know what he's up to in these chapters Paul tells us and it's important that we take to heart what he says in a sentence it's this

[20 : 10] God in this world where sin abounds and hearts are hard and eyes are blind in this world God is showing sovereign mercy or shall I say merciful sovereignty in creating for himself a people a people who live the new life in Christ a people who praise and adore already and will go on doing that forever and a people in whose number you've got not simply Jews but non-Jews from just about everywhere in the world Christianity is a faith for all people everywhere and the people the community the church that God is creating is a church in which all nations nationalities identities are going to be represented and just because

Paul is a cross-cultural missionary that is he's a Jew who's presenting the gospel to a mainly Gentile church which is what the Roman church was Paul talks a lot directly about Jews and non-Jews together and as we go through the chapters we find that this is what he's on about now this is where I have to fly over points that I would like to spend time on you'd be here all night if I did so let me say in a very summary way in chapters 9 10 and 11 Paul declares four realities four truths about God and what God is doing in his world in chapter 9 verses 6 through 19 well sorry let's say I should say I think 29 there

Paul establishes the trustworthiness of God's word having said a lot of Jewish people don't believe the gospel he immediately says in verse 6 of chapter 9 that doesn't mean that the word of God has failed or proved untrue nothing of the sort what you see here is something which you see all through the Bible story God elects or selects those whom he will bless not everybody is blessed as some are blessed and God reserves the right to do that which he may well do because as he told us in chapters 1 2 and 3 nobody deserves any mercy everybody deserves condemnation so the marvelous thing is that he shows mercy to any to many even though as I said the dark side of that is that he doesn't show the same mercy to everyone that he shows to some well

Paul simply expands that in these verses he expands it from the story of Abraham the story of Isaac and words spoken to Moses and he says this is still going on and then second Paul reminds us of the terms of God's gospel the word of God is being fulfilled the terms of the gospel are being proved true by those who believe if you look at chapter 10 you see him doing that in chapter 10 faith in Christ as the way of salvation the only way of salvation is the big thing that Paul talks about if you just look at some of the key verses you'll see that verse four Christ is the end of the law that everyone who has faith may be justified verse six the righteousness based on faith that's the righteousness which

Paul proclaims in his gospel that righteousness says don't set yourself to do something spectacular because that isn't the way of salvation no if you look at verse eight you see what the word does say the word is near you on your lips and in your heart that's the word of faith which we preach the gospel message because now here it is if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved for man believes with his heart and so is justified and he confesses with his lips and so is saved those are the terms of the gospel says Paul and verse 11 the scripture says no one who believes in him will be put to shame verse 12 there's no distinction between Jew and Greek the same Lord this is the Lord Jesus is

[26 : 02] Lord of all and bestows his riches his wealth upon all who call upon everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved you see there that Paul is putting his point very much in Old Testament terms with Old Testament echoes and the words that he chooses to use well yes because Paul's basic claim for the Christian gospel is that it's the fulfillment of everything that the Old Testament looked forward to predicted hoped for and sketched out foreshadowed shall I say in a whole series of different ways and again I wish that we could spend time looking at this but we can't this is Paul reminding us of the terms of God's gospel having already reminded us of the trustworthiness of God's word then we jump now to the end of chapter 11 the verses or some of the verses that were read to us as our second lesson here what Paul calls attention to is what I call the triumph of God's grace

Paul is talking about the method that God follows in bringing people to faith in Christ and salvation what's the method well the first thing he does is make them realize that they need this because they are outsiders they are sinners they are lost and the gospel comes to them not as the reward of merit but as the gift of mercy and I said this before Paul is saying it very strongly at the end of chapter 11 there's a key word actually which runs through these verses which at this point we'd better learn it's the word that we first met in Romans chapter 8 and verse 30 where Paul said again talking about the eternal purpose of God let's go back to verse 29 so that you see the well to verse 28 so that you see the flow of thought we know that in everything

God works for good to those who love him who are called according to his purpose call is the key word for those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and those whom he predestined he also called and those whom he called he also justified now you can see from the way that Paul's reasoning goes that when he says called what he's talking about is a work of God a complex work of God whereby through the word which the Holy Spirit opens to the sinner's heart God brings the needy person that's you and me to a living faith in Jesus and God is the one who's to be praised for the whole process from beginning to end yes I know that human decision and human commitment is part of it but it's

God who moves us in our hearts to make that commitment and to register that decision he changes the heart which he finds in the grip of sin so that we're now free to do that and we do it and he prompts us to do it and that's how it is that you and I are converted everyone who recognizes the need for conversion and humbly asks the Lord to help them to the point where they are able to receive Christ and do so is going to have their prayer answered don't be in any doubt about that God is gracious to everyone who turns to him calls on him utters the best of all prayers the one word prayer help help me to repent help me to believe help me to become a Christian help me to receive the Lord

Jesus and live to him help so don't let your imagination be haunted by a fantasy which has bothered a lot of people down the centuries the fantasy that there are in the world people who want to be saved but God slams the door in their face and says no salvation for you no everyone who says help help in the way that I've just described will receive the help that he or she asks for and when we are witnessing to our friends and our family well this is one of the things that we have to explain to them it's not that the Lord helps those who help themselves it's the exact opposite the Lord helps those who can't help themselves and who cast themselves on his mercy and ask him to enable them what by nature they can't do that's

[31 : 48] God calling and now if you look through these three chapters you'll find that the thought of God calling pops up in a number of places look at chapter nine verse ten sorry verse eleven I should be saying there Paul is talking about Rebecca and her twins they were not yet born he says in verse eleven they done nothing either good or bad but in order that God's purpose of election might continue not because of works but because of his call she was told that they're going to have different destinies these two children of yours God is going to call one in a way that he doesn't call the other and if you look now at chapter nine and verse twenty four it's page one hundred and fifty Paul is uttering a long sentence which really is concerned to remind his readers of the way things are verse twenty two what if God desiring to show his wrath and make known his power which is part of the reality of the situation has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction in order to make known in the situation where he's doing that the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy even us whom he has called see whom he's brought to faith not from the Jews only but also from the

Gentiles that is from non Jews and if you look at chapter eleven verse twenty nine this key word reappears you turn the page what do we find here the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable so if your idea was that God has given up altogether on Jewish people and there are not going to be any Jews saved no Jews in the Christian church think again God has a purpose of calling and he stays with it and that as a matter of fact is the way things are today I don't know if you have links with those who are committed to Jewish evangelism but it is a fact that in this last thirty years preaching the gospel to Jewish people has been more fruitful than it's been literally for centuries well this is the triumph of God's grace because now we've got to the point where you can see what Paul wants us to understand it's verse twenty nine we just read it it goes on with thirty through thirty two just as you were once disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience who's they well it's

Jewish people and who are you well you are non-Jews you are Gentiles you were told you were for centuries that you were outsiders that there was no mercy from God for you well it isn't so as you were once disobedient to God but now you've received mercy because of their disobedience so they have been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy for God has consigned all people to disobedience that he may have mercy on all that's Paul saying that everyone whom God calls and saves is first brought to acknowledge themselves as outsiders without Christ persons lost because of their sin persons for whom by nature there's no hope and

then the gospel comes against that black background and presents to them a savior who brings hope and that says

Paul is the method of God's grace in saving everybody he makes us realize how totally undeserving his love and his mercy are he makes us realize that in fact we were really lost until Jesus found us and that's the way that God means it to go and when in chapter 11 Paul talks about jealousy saying that in his ministry to the non-Jews he's hoping to make Jews jealous what he means by jealous the word of course has all sorts of associations but what Paul means by jealous is that it'll be God's way to make Jewish people realize that non-Jews have got a blessing a new life which they themselves haven't got for all that they inherit all kinds of privileges from the

Old Testament order of things they haven't got this new life and they need it as much as anyone so they become stirred to seek what it is that the Gentiles have got and so Gentiles outsiders brought into the kingdom by sovereign grace and now Jews brought into the kingdom by sovereign grace they are together as people who praise the Lord for undeserved mercy they are together because neither Jew nor Gentile deserved any mercy from God and both Jew and Gentile in the church have received mercy from God so says Paul let's praise God together that this is so oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God and so this is Paul telling us of the triumph of

[38 : 16] God's grace we see bits of it now and it goes on and it will continue going on that way until the Lord comes back and then finally in leading us to doxology and praise Paul sets before us the truth of God's glory the revelation of his mercy in the gospel is an adorable thing and we must learn to adore it well surely we know that we've been singing hymns that praise the Lord for his free grace to us and that's right that's what we should be doing and that as I said before is what we should be doing to all eternity there's joy in praise you adore in the terms of verse 33 of chapter 11 the depth oh the depth Paul says depth when he's talking about something which it's really beyond our capacity to measure it's a greater thing than our minds can grasp oh the depth of the riches that's the riches of his grace and you see that if you glance back to chapter 10 verse 12 same

Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches on all who call upon him salvation is an enriching thing it's a glorious thing as chapters 3 4 5 6 7 and 8 showed earlier on the depth of the riches the wisdom and the knowledge of God who could have guessed that God would be working out a plan like this well nobody says Paul it's a matter of revelation it blows the mind to think that this is what God is up to but this really is the heart of what's happening in God's world as his messengers go out with the gospel and seek to bring everyone to Christ to present everyone perfect in Christ Jesus as Paul says in Colossians chapter one and in fact it doesn't happen quite like that but a great number of believers are brought into the kingdom and they become the new community which praises God for his grace to all eternity so what are we seeing we are seeing sovereign mercy we are seeing what God is up to we are seeing that he's in charge and he doesn't owe anyone anything but we're seeing that in his sovereign lordship he is very merciful and brings thousands into his kingdom calling them through the gospel in the manner described I swing my search light for just a moment to Paul's first readers here's a point which I can only state in a single sentence I haven't time to develop it but Paul at the beginning of Romans chapter 11 labours to explain to the non-Jewish believers at Rome that they in fact are in the position of a wild olive grafted into an olive tree in other words they have been given an identity and the identity is that they're

God's true Israel yes God's true Israel and that's who we are if this point were well understood in the church there wouldn't be any anti-semitism there wouldn't be any racism with regard to the Jews we are God's Israel in Christ that's the thought and as I said I don't have time to elaborate it read verses 17 through 24 of chapter 11 at your leisure and you'll see that now yes at last I pull the threads together and train the searchlight on ourselves you and me do we know what to do with this teaching which probably has awed us at certain points well I want to sign off by urging that what we are to do with it is what

Paul did with it Paul praised and you've got the doxology verses 33 through 36 of chapter 11 picking up the thought of the Lord Jesus as God blessed forever in chapter 9 and verse 5 Paul praised and for us when we are perplexed about the ways of God praising for what we know of the ways of God rather than puzzling over what we don't understand that's the way to go that's the way of joy that's the way of confidence that's the way to walk in God's presence for his glory so praise that's one thing that we must be doing all the time we are to glorify the Lord we are to practice for heaven as I said earlier and with our praising we are to pray just as

[44 : 08] Paul prayed our hearts are going to hurt just as his heart hurt because people very dear to him didn't believe so what does he do he goes on praying for them and that's what we must do when our saviour puts people on our heart we are to pray and pray and pray God blesses people God calls people through his word in answer to prayer Paul you remember often asks his readers in his different letters to pray for him that the word may go out in power when he speaks it and here he has lifted the veil on the praying that he regularly does for his Jewish friends and that's a model for the praying that we should be regularly doing for the people we want to see in the kingdom whose eyes haven't been opened as yet so praise and pray and proclaim that's the third thing

Paul remember is saying all this as an evangelist well we're all of us evangelists in one sense we are sent into this dark world to tell people that without Jesus they're lost that Jesus is a living savior who brings them into newness of life new relationship with God new life through the Holy Spirit everything transformed God go on proclaiming brothers and sisters go on praising go on praying and that's what Paul models don't ever think that the things Paul says about himself personally are really not part of his message Paul himself is part of his message the truth that he taught is one thing and Paul the teacher himself seeking to live by it in praise and prayer and in proclamation which he's called to that's the other part of it so as

I close this bird's eye view of these three chapters leaving you with any number of details to study up for yourselves I say praise pray proclaim this is the big message this is what God is saying to us all through our study of these chapters tonight God give us ears to hear hearts to understand and zeal to do Amen this mp3 sermon along with many others is available from the st john's shaughnessy website at www.stjohnshaughnessy.org that that address www.stjohnshaughnessy.org on the website you will also find information about ministries worship services and special events at st.

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