



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 11:28-36

"God's Agenda for the Nations"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Returning to Romans chapter 11 for the last of our studies in the great theodicy of Romans 9 through 11, and in order to pick up some of the context again, we'll begin the Scripture reading for today at verse 25; Romans chapter 11, verse 25 through verse 26. You'll remember that 25, 26, and 27 was the subject of our study last Sunday. The apostle writes:

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness (and we pointed out that that word is better rendered hardness) that hardness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. (And we also tried to point out that the meaning of "be come in" is "come into the olive tree" the source of divine blessing in the covenantal series of promises given in the Old Testament. Verse 26): And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. (Now our today our study will begin with verse 28, and the apostle gives us something of an overview of what he has been doing, God that is, over the centuries.) As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the Father's sakes, for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now

obtained mercy through their unbelief: (better by reason of their unbelief) Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him (or perhaps for him), are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

[Prayer removed from audio]

[Message] Our subject for this morning as we turn to the concluding section of Paul's letter to the Romans is "The Agenda for the Nations" or "God's Agenda for the Nations." The apostle has argued the future of ethnic Israel by the explanation of the purpose of her falling away. He has pointed out that Jewish disobedience in the present day has been for the purpose of Gentile salvation. But that Gentile salvation has a still further purpose, one which returns to the nation Israel. And that is, by virtue of Gentile salvation, Israel may be provoked to jealousy, as Moses taught in Deuteronomy chapter 32. And there may follow the salvation of the nation Israel and then worldwide blessings. The apostle has taught this by virtue also of the olive tree parable. He has pointed out that the olive tree, which represents the Abrahamic promises and the blessings that have flown out of his covenantal program, the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the New covenants, he has pointed out that Israel was the natural branches. Abraham's and the father's being the root, and that the Jews have been cut off, and there have been grafted into that olive tree branches from among the Gentiles who are cut off of a wild olive tree in order to be grafted into the cultivated olive tree of Abrahamic blessing. He said that is contrary to horticulture, and of course, it is contrary to

horticulture, because you don't take an uncultivated scion and graft it into a cultivated stock, but vice versa. The apostle knew enough about horticulture to realize that his illustration was contrary to it.

And the he said in the light of the fact that they, Israel, were the natural branches, if you take wild branches and graft them into a cultivated stock, how much more may we then expect that the natural branches will be grafted in again into their own olive tree. So he says, not only is it possible by faith for Israel to return to blessing, he stated that in "And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again." But it is to be expected logically. "For if you, the Gentiles, were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" Now, we have seen Gentiles' salvation take place. The fact that Gentiles' salvation has taken place is one of the strongest arguments for ultimate ethnic Jewish salvation again, because they are the natural branches. And so if we, Gentiles, have been saved, grafted into that olive tree contrary to nature, we may then expect that ethnic Israel shall have a future.

We've pointed out that many in evangelical circles, even, who are genuine Christian men, react very negatively to the idea of a national future for the nation Israel, but it does seem that the apostle sets it forth quite plainly here. Of course, this is not the only passage. But many other passages also affirm the same thing. That raise, of course, the question of the plan of God, the broad plan of God, his dealings with the nations, and so Paul now obliges his readers by surveying the broad sweep of God's dealing with the nations; the nation Israel and the nations of the Gentiles. As you read these verses, verse 28 through verse 32 particularly, you notice the occurrence of the word mercy. It occurs four times in this section. It becomes, in a sense, the key word. "Mystery" he had mentioned above, the secret of the divine dealings. And the secret of divine dealings seems to center on the idea of mercy. And we shall see that it is the idea of mercy shown to the Gentiles and shown also to the Jews that is the secret of God in the program of the ages. In other words, as we look back in human history all the way back to Adam, and then reflect on it all the way through in the

future when life as we know it shall end, one of the key things that God has been doing is manifesting his mercy.

The Greek word mercy, *eleos*, indicates the need for help in a miserable situation. Someone put it a long time ago, "Grace is for the guilty, mercy is for the miserable." Now those who are guilty are also miserable, and so grace and mercy are often put together by the writers of Scripture and by the Apostle Paul. This Greek word has within it the idea of living from others. We know the term eleemosynary, as eleemosynary institutions such as, for example, the Red Cross, the United Fund, the American Cancer Society, the Boy Scouts, the Christian church. These are all eleemosynary institutions. There is a Greek eleemosynary which means alms, or alms giving, built on the word for mercy, *eleos*. So eleemosynary institutions are institutions that live by contributions; that is, they live by the contributions of others, just like the Christian church. And just like Believers Chapel lives from the contributions of its friends; so eleemosynary institutions, *eleos* meaning living from others.

I have a good friend who is a minister of the gospel. He lived in Denver, Colorado and teaches at the same institution over which Dr. Haddon Robinson is the president. He's one of the professors of English Bible and also teaches some theology there. He's a man, now, probably close to retiring, and he, ever since he was a young man, has had very little eyesight. If he were to preach in Believers Chapel, he would take his Bible and put it this close to his eyes. And his glasses are very much like a magnifying glass. And he cannot see other than that. If you are standing three feet or four feet away from him, he would not recognize you, except perhaps by your voice. But he's one of the outstanding Bible teachers in this country. He was the assistant to Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse for many years, and has an excellent comprehension of the word of God and a great ability in the communication of it. He also is a Calvinist. [Laughter] That's the icing on the cake of course. [Laughter] But anyway, he is a very fine man.

Many years ago, he was the pastor of a metropolitan church in New York. And he also, incidentally, is a bachelor and has been throughout all of his life. He was the pastor of this church in metropolitan New York, and he used to have an old Scottish lady, when he was young, to come in

each Wednesday to take care of the manse for him. And she always brought the children to lunch, because the school was just across the street from the manse. And so, he invited her to come and to bring her children into lunch. He was responsible for them. And so every time they would sit down at the table of Wednesday, she would say after he had given thanks for the food. She would say, "Eat up, it's on the pastor; we do not have to pay for it today!" [Laughter] And evidence of the fact that while she was a Scottish woman, she still maintained some of the characteristics of her people in the old country.

On one of those occasions Dr. Chafer said that he finally thought he ought to say something to her. He said, "You know, when you say, 'Eat up, it's on the pastor; we do not have to pay for it today!' you make me think of a verse of Scripture from Ephesians, 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us.' And because of His mercy we can say, 'Eat up, it is on the Lord; we do not have to pay for it today.' Well, that's the mercy of God. It means, essentially, that we have been given that mercy that contains within it the payment for our sins by the Lord Jesus Christ, and we can enjoy our salvation, because we don't have to pay the debt that we owe, he has paid it for us.

Well, the apostle, I say, has been talking about the salvation of the nations, and he's been talking about the salvation of the nation. And so, here in these final verses he will put it all together and give us, as in the kind of recapitulation, his agenda for the nations. Now, I don't know whether you noticed it or not, either in your reading or when we read the Scripture here, but verse 28 through verse 32, it is the climax of Romans 9, 10, and 11. It contains two balanced sentences, each constructed on the same pattern. Each contains a pair of antithetical clauses, and then an explanatory clause introduced by a "for" clause." Let me point that out to you. In verse 28 he says, "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your, Gentiles' sakes." That's one side of the antithesis. But as touching the election, they are beloved for the Father's sake, that's the other side. And then the explanatory words, "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

And now he does the same thing with two antitheses and an explanatory clause, but this time with a little more detail. "For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief," that's one side. "Even so have these also now not believed," that is the Jews, "that through your mercy," the mercy shown to you, "they also may obtain mercy." That's the other side of the antithesis, and then the explanatory clause again. "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all." Now, this indicates, very obviously that the apostle is writing with great care. He is very much concerned to put this down just right. And so with care and with feeling he sets forth this agenda for the nations. And I think it is important for us to grasp it if we are to understand what God is doing in our day, the program and plan for which he is working. And thus, we will be better able to understand our relationship to it.

Let's turn now to turn verse 28 and verse 29, where Israel's inevitable future is before the reader. Remember this great principle of the word of God, God is immutable. That is, he is unchangeable. In the Old Testament, it is expressed in words such as "For I am the Lord, I change not." And so when he gives promises unconditionally, he will fulfill them. Now, of course, God may give conditional promises, in that case the fulfillment of them may depend upon certain conditions. But those conditions must be stated. In the case of the great promises given to Abraham, and then to David, and then the great promises of the New covenant, the forgiveness of sins, those conditions were not stated. Those were unconditional promises. They rest on the faithfulness of God in the fulfilling of his word.

Now, we must bear that in mind for he has said, in verse 28, "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the Father's sakes." So the statement is a statement of the inevitable future of the nation Israel. That word "enemies" is word that is passive in significance in this case. He doesn't mean that the Israelites are actively hostile to God here. In that sense, we all are hostile towards God. But what he means is the Jews, as unbelieving and rejected are enemies. So, as concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. He is not working with reference to them as a nation. There are individual Jews who make up the

remnant. We've already talked about in a previous message. But as touching the election, they are beloved for the Father's sake. In other words, the elation, that refers to the covenant promises given to Abraham and confirmed through the Old Testament. Because of those covenant promises, Israel may expect to find ultimately the experience of the love of God. They are beloved because of the Father's sake. Not on the ground of merit, but on the ground of God's fidelity to his word. That's important. Israel's blessing is not traceable to any merit that they have. It is traceable purely and simply to the fidelity of God to his word, which he has given in grace.

Now, questions often are raised at this point, but what about Israel's unbelief? Did not the Israelite nation, were they not guilty of deicide, or of the death of Jesus Christ. Well, yes, and so were the Gentiles. All men, ideally, in the death of Christ are guilty, in that the Gentiles and the Jews collaborated in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But now, what about that unbelief? Does that cancel the promises of God? Well, Paul has answered that back in chapter 3, as well as in Romans 9, 10, and 11. Back in chapter 3 he said specifically, Israel had the oracles, the promises. "But what if some did not believe?" he asks. "Shall their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?" Then in Romans 3:4 he says, "God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged." When God makes an unconditional promise, it shall be fulfilled. We may put it off by our unbelief. We may find that the fulfillment of those promises is postponed, but the ultimate fulfillment of the unconditional promises of God is to be seen by those who are in Christ. So the apostle speaks of Israel's inevitable future.

And why? Why, he states in verse 29, "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." What does he mean when he says, "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance?" Well, this is a statement of the immutability of the promises of God. Now, if you looked at this in the original text, this word that is translated here, "without repentance" is a word that means something like literally, "without regret." The gifts and calling of God are without regret. Why are they unregrettable on God's part? Why they are unregrettable, because they are irrevocable.

He has made them and they are unconditional promises, and so consequently these gifts and this calling, they are unregrettable because they are irrevocable. They are unconditional.

What are, however, the gifts and the calling of God? This past week, teaching in Trinity Seminary in Chicago, the subject of spiritual gifts came up. And we were discussing the spiritual gifts that are set forth in the New Testament for Christian service, and discussing a little bit the permanence, or impermanence of them. And one of the students cited this text, "For the gifts and calling of God are not to be regretted," and sought on the basis of that to indicate that the gifts of God, such as the gift of healing, the gift of tongues, the gift of miracles, those gifts are still with us today, because the gifts of God are not to be regretted. Or they cited this particular text in the Authorized Version "are without repentance." But the apostle is not speaking of spiritual gifts here, regardless of how that question may be answered. That was a text taken out of its context.

When he says the gifts and the calling of God, he's talking about the nation Israel, and the gifts that were given to them. If you just read back in Romans a few chapters, to the 9th chapter, and you read verse 4 and verse 5, you will see what the gifts are. He says they are Israelites to whom pertain the adoption. That's one of the gifts. They were, as a nation, the sons of God. And the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the promises, whose are the Father's, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came who is over all, God blessed forever, so all of these things are the gifts of God. They are the things that made Israel the people of God, and to whom God gave his promises as mediators of them. They were, in a sense, the depository of the promises of God, and it was their responsibility to preach this word to the people of their day. They were to be his witnesses. So they were depositories of the word of God. The gifts, those were the gifts.

But the calling of God, what about the calling of God? Well, the calling of God is that particular act of election, whereby God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and then called the others of that long line of faithful men and gave them the task of proclaiming the word of God. So

the gifts, those blessings that he bestowed upon them, and that calling that they should be his witnesses to their world, these are things that God does not regret because they are irrevocable.

About fifteen years or twenty years ago, in *Time Magazine* in the religion section, one week it was devoted to Judaism. And several of the rabbis were quoted on various points, and one rabbi, by the name of Finkelstein was quoted. Do you think he was a member of ethnic Israel? The Rabbi Finkelstein, speaking about the calling of God of the nation Israel, and the choosing of that nation said, "The choosing by God was like Selective Service, binding on all Jews to the last generation on earth." Well, he had hit on a truth, that calling of God is binding. Now, of course, so far as every individual Israelite is concerned that's another matter, because there is an Israel within an Israel, as the Old Testament makes very plain. "In Isaac shall Thy seed be called." And so it was necessary for that true Israel to be a believing Israel, but those promises of God are binding. And God has bound himself to them.

Well, having said that the apostle comes to the final of his balanced sentences in verse 30 through verse 32. He says, "For as ye," that is you Gentiles, "in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy." Now, you'll notice that in these sentences which are balanced and antithetical, there is a kind of reiteration and confirmation of the argument of the preceding verses. What the apostle is simply saying is what he have in the Old Testament times is essentially the choosing of the nation Israel and the Gentiles are unbelieving. In the present day we have essentially the acceptance of the Gentiles and Israel is in unbelief. And we may expect, in the light of the unconditional nature of the promises of God, that Israel in the future shall become a believing nation again, and that by the means of that there will be blessings to the whole of the Gentile world. In other words, the end of the road, both the Jew and the Gentiles, is the mercy of God. And for each of these, for the Jew and for the Gentiles, the road to that mercy leads through a period of disobedience.

Now, let's look at it in just a little bit more detail. But before I do, I want to comment on a point in case there is someone in the audience who is ready very carefully the text, perhaps even has a Greek text before him, or I believe the New American Standard Bible or the New International Version inserts this little word. In verse 31 we read, "Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy." But now in some of the Greek manuscripts, there is another now inserted in that last clause, "That they also may now obtain mercy." That little word "now" is something of a problem. I cannot explain the details and reasons for it. But there are manuscripts, very good manuscripts, that do not have it, with a wide attestation, and then there are some very good manuscripts that do have that word "now." In fact, there are some that have the word "later." And thus that verse would read, "Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may later obtain mercy." It's obvious a scribe, anticipating future ethnic salvation for Israel inserted the word *husteron*, which means later, at that point. And some of the manuscripts, not very significant ones, have the word "later."

Scribes were just like human beings. In the first place they made mistakes copying the words of the Bible. You, when you copy, make mistakes. Often when you are copying something you will omit a word, or you will write it twice. Many of you have done that, I can tell just by looking at your face. You are the kind of people who would do that. [Laughter] Those are well-known scribal errors. And so in our manuscript tradition of the New Testament we have duplications of words, we have omissions of words. We also have omissions of even a whole statement, a whole line or two, when the end of one word is similar to the end of the next sentence. When your eyes copies the sentence, instead of picking up the place where you stopped, you look up at the page and down a little bit is the same word, and you start copying from there. And so, sometimes a whole verse is sometimes left out of a particular manuscript.

In this case, it is impossible to know whether that "now" is genuine or not. If it were genuine, then there would be more reason to say that the apostle is saying at this point that Israel may obtain mercy now. And all that would mean would be that it is through Gentile salvation now

that Israel is being provoked to jealousy now, and Israel is being saved as a remnant at the present time. Or perhaps the now refers to the end of this Messianic age in which we are living. In that case, it would refer to the future, but the future of this age in which we are living. If it is absent, then it is referring to essentially the same thing, the end of this age, when as Paul has stated above, all Israel shall be saved. All right, with that view now, I know that you are feeling now a little confused, but I want you to know that there are people, incidentally, who have come in this audience in the midst of the exposition of Romans, and have gotten it. So there is hope for you. [Laughter]

About five weeks ago I got on the plane to go to Chicago. On a Wednesday morning I was going up early, because I had been preaching on Thursday nights, and sometimes Wednesday nights in a little new church that is starting out west of the city of Chicago. The pastor of the church is a graduate of Trinity Seminary and asked me if I would come and give a series of messages on prophecy for them. So I left Thursday morning, and I was sitting in the American Airlines plane ready for it to take off, and as men were coming through a young man, I'm going to guess his age now. If he's in the audience he'll pardon me if I've missed it a bit. He was about; he looked like he was maybe thirty years of age. He walked by and I just happened to look up. I was looking at a newspaper. And he said, "Good morning, Dr. Johnson." And passed by and later came back and told me who he was and the company for which he worked. And we had a very interesting conversation. But he gave me his personal card, and on the back of it are some words that are written, and I think they are for you. He said, "Thank you for bringing the light of Jesus to my heart." And then at the bottom, "I, of all people, needed Romans." Well, we all need Romans. And I know that it is difficult at times to understand some of these things that the apostle is talking about. But evidently he thought that the church in Rome needed Romans, too.

Well, let me sum up them what Paul has just said here for you, in case you've missed it. What he said is this, as you look at God's program for the ages, in the opening stages of it, the Gentiles were disobedient. Perhaps we can think of Genesis chapter 1, verse 1 through verse 11, time of the placing of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and then Adam and Eve fall and God's

judgment upon man because of his sin. Paul, in Romans has said, "God gave them over. God gave them over. God gave them over." So Gentiles disobedience was the beginning of the program of God in order that mercy might be manifested to Israel. He says, "For as ye in times past have not believed God," Genesis 1: 1-11, "yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief:" Now, I skipped a little bit ahead of myself there, but Gentile disobedience is the beginning of the Old Testament.

Then in Genesis chapter 12, we read of the call of Abraham and the beginning of the program that had to do with him. "For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy." So you can see that there was a period of time when Israel was elected, and then disobedience resulted. So Paul says, "As ye have in times past not believed God, yet now have obtained mercy through their unbelief." So we have a period of Gentile disobedience, and then we have a period of Israel's election, and that has now been followed, Paul says, by disobedience.

I would gather that what he means is the period of time from Genesis chapter 12 all the way through the 1st chapter of the Book of Acts, which climaxed in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter 11, in verse 7, the apostle said, "What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were hardened." So they have Gentile disobedience, and the Israel's election and then disobedience, and so the third step is Gentile election, and that is what is going on in the present day. The fullness of the Gentiles is coming into the olive tree, and that is designed to provoke Israel to jealousy in order that they may ultimately be saved; so Gentile election in the present day, but the Scripture say that Gentile election shall end in disobedience. For the Bible predicts that in the last days of the age of Gentile salvation, we shall see apostasy and unbelief in the churches. That, of course, is what we do see today.

This past week, on the first page of the Dallas paper we have this heading, "Presbyterians Decide Jesus is Truly God." Now, of course, there is a sense in which we can rejoice in that.

[Laughter] But there is a sense in which that is tragic, because of course, Presbyterians have a great tradition. They have a tradition that goes back to such men as John Calvin and others who, down through the years have been faithful to the teaching of Holy Scripture. And the Westminster Confession of Faith is a decidedly orthodox Christian statement of the faith. Why is it necessary for a church in its general assembly to decide that Jesus is the Son of God, something so fundamental in biblical doctrine? That he is truly God. Well, the reason that they must have this motion, and must pass upon it, is because it's obvious that's a problem in the church. In other words, there are vast numbers, evidently, who do not believe in that church that Jesus is God.

Not too long ago, the thing that called this up was the ordination of a man in a union presbytery, who was asked the question, is Jesus God? Incidentally, this was only asked later because someone raised objection to his ordination at the beginning. But anyway, he answered, "No, God is God." It was clear that he had answered Jesus was not God. They went ahead and ordained him. They have not changed that ordination either. He still stands as ordained in that church. The striking thing about that statement is not simply its denial of the deity of Christ; it is his misunderstanding of the fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith, the trinity. When you say, "No, he's not God, but God is God," that's confusing and contradictory. For just as the Father is God, and the Spirit is God, so the Son is God; the Father is God, the Son is God; the Spirit is God. But we don't worship three gods, but one God. So when we say, "No, God is God," we not only deny the deity of Christ, we actually exhibit a confusion over the doctrine of the trinity.

Now, having gotten, because of the difficulty this has caused in the church, having got the assembly on record six hundred and twenty-eight to two that Jesus is God, one of the other conservative men in that denomination stood on his feet and proposed that they had to the statement the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ had a sinless life, died an atoning death, and rose from the dead bodily. Those are also fundamental doctrines of the Westminster Confession of Faith. That was voted down. One then asks, why, why did they officially go on record that Jesus was God at the same time being unwilling to add the other things? That's a question, of course, that ultimately

can only be answered by those who made up the general assembly. But it certainly leaves a lot of questions in the minds of those who think about the health of the Christian church today.

Now, I say then the Bible teaches that this age shall end in apostasy and disobedience. And finally, the fourth of the stages is set forth in this chapter, in which Israel, made jealous by Gentile salvation shall be delivered, brought into the faith. So all Israel shall be saved and as a result of that, there shall be world wide spiritual blessing so great that it is going to be just like life from the dead, the apostle states above. That, I think, is what we find in Revelation chapter 4, verse 20. So let me sum it up. First stage of the divine program, Genesis 1:1-11, Gentile disobedience. Then God, taking one man out of the Gentiles disobedience, a man by the name of Abraham, continues his national program. We have the election of the nation Israel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants.

But Israel is in disobedience with the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel goes to the Gentiles. The full number of the Gentiles is being gathered into the olive tree, partaking of the root and fatness of the Abrahamic covenantal blessings. That period of time began on the day of Pentecost and will conclude with the final history of the church in its disobedience, perhaps the period of time in the Bible from Acts chapter 2 on through Revelation chapter 3. And then when the great program of the last days is set in motion during the tribulation period. God is his great judgments will pour them out upon both Gentiles and Jews, but out of that will come both Jewish national salvation and ultimately the salvation of so many in the world that when we get to heaven we will discover a vast multitude there, which no man could number, from every kindred, tribe, tongue, and nation. What a magnificent program God is working out.

Now, it is only natural then that apostle should at this point conclude with a doxology. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" The apostle is caught up in the spirit of Wesley's love divine with its "lost in wonder, love and praise." And if I might, as a preacher say, what can we possibly say say, when Paul is so overcome. One of the commentators has said, "We have learned

Paul's meaning only when we can join in this ascription of praise." And I say to you in the audience and you who may be listening over the radio. We can learn Paul's meaning only when we can join in this great ascription of praise. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

What does Paul mean by wisdom? Why, he means his purpose, his purpose to carry out this great divine program. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom," as the apostle surveys what God is doing in history, he's amazed at it. And he has reflected upon the fact that it all designed that men should be concluded in unbelief. Verse 32, which I skipped for a moment, "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief," that's a word, incidentally, that means to shut up in prison. It's the word that was used of those fishermen when the Lord Jesus came along and asked them had they been able to catch any fish. And they said, "No, we've fished all night and have caught nothing."

Well, he said, "Cast on the other side of the net." Commentators say that he looked out there and saw a school of fish playing out there. Can you imagine? Can you imagine Peter made his living from fishing, and John made his living from fishing, missing a school of fish playing out on the other side of the boat? [Laughter] They knew that lake just like the back of their hands. It was a little lake to start with. But our Lord said, "Cast on the other side." And the Scripture says, "At his word they cast on the other side, and they enclosed a great multitude of fish." That's the word that's used here. It's like having you in a net, and so he says the Scripture has put into prison, it's also used of putting men into prison, "has put men in the prison of unbelief that he might have mercy upon all." Some say, "Ah, that does it. God hath concluded them all in unbelief that he might have mercy upon all." They say, "You see, Christ did die for all." You don't study the Scriptures that way. The Scriptures are to be studied intensively.

Listen, if that all meant every single individual; every single individual would be saved. "He has concluded all in unbelief," if that meant every single individual, though that's true, but if Paul meant that here, then when he says, "might have mercy upon all" that would mean that everybody would be saved. And then what's the point of Christ's death? What's Paul talking about? He's

talking about nations. He said, "He concluded them all," all the nations, the Gentiles nations and the Israelite nation, in unbelief. He's passed them through this period of time, the Gentiles and Jews, that he might have mercy on all. What? All the nations, Gentiles nations and Jewish nations; not everybody without exception, but everybody with distinction is the apostle's meaning. Otherwise we would have hopeless confusion in the word of God.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom," what a magnificent program; Gentile disobedience, Jewish acceptance, and Gentile disobedience, then Gentile acceptance, Jewish disobedience, and finally Jewish acceptance and worldwide salvation. Why all of this? Because God wants to pass all the nations through the experience of disobedience that they might learn the experience of mercy. That's what he's trying to teach us. He's trying to teach Gentiles and he's trying to teach Jews, the doctrine of mercy. And you cannot understand the doctrine of mercy until you have known sin and the lost condition and judgment that belongs to sinners. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge," what's the knowledge? Why, the knowledge is the means that God has employed to carry out his end of manifesting mercy. So he says wisdom to show his mercy, knowledge, this program that we're seeing, his agenda for the nations, magnificent.

And then the apostle, as is his custom, says his final words in the words of Scripture, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" Now, I must stop there for just a moment, because I need to say a word to my Arminian friends. Now, my Arminian friends, if you believe in Christ you are one with us, and we love you in Christ. But I want you to look at this text, because we would like for you to have the full joy of your salvation. [Laughter] Now, he says, "Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" If it were really true that God looked down through the years and saw who would be, and because he saw who would believe he rewarded their faith by election. Then could he say, "Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" No, no. Had man first given to God something for which he could claim a recompense, then the divine wisdom would not be free, it would not be inexplicable, too. It

would determined and conditioned by human faith, and therefore with the reach and cognizance of human calculation. But Paul says, "His judgments, and his ways past finding out!" That's what we believe. Well, I'm speaking for myself. That's why I believe. I hope you do, too. "His judgments, and his ways past finding out!" We can only look at the sovereign love of God and say, "He loved me and gave himself for me." There is no other explanation behind that. And why he loved me and why he loved you, well looking at you, I have no reason to know why, and you looking at me know exactly the same thing.

So he concludes, "Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, from him are all things." And they are of him, through him, and for him. So the independent sovereignty of God is a sufficient negative to the preceding statement, "Who hath first given to him and it shall be recompensed?" No one first gave, because everything is from him. And if down through the years God knows that S. Lewis Johnson will believe, it is because he has determined that S. Lewis Johnson will believe. That's why he knows it. So "of him," even my faith that is of him, and it is through him, through the working of the Holy Spirit he has brought me to faith. And it is for him that I might glorify him. All of his works, in creation, in providence, and in redemption, are the work of our great sovereign, merciful God.

As one might expect, the apostle concludes on the note of the ineffable glory of God, "to whom be glory for ever." He couldn't say that if anything came from us. He would say, "To whom and to man be glory for ever and ever." So by faith alone, by grace alone, leads on to God alone be the glory. So Israel has its national future. Israel is preserved among the nations, and you well know that today in the midst of the Gentiles there is an Israel. They are still there, because God's promises are irrevocable, they will be fulfilled. In our theological colleges there are individuals who in the past decades and generations have said, "Abraham, they don't even know if Abraham lived." And all the time they were saying, "We don't know whether Abraham lived," there is a people scattered over the whole earth who say when they mention Abraham, "Abraham, *abienu*, Abraham, our father." And then there are some that look at the Scriptures, particularly the Scriptures that have to do with

Mosaic records, and they say, "We don't know whether Moses wrote the Pentateuch." In fact, today still in our theological colleges men are standing up and telling our young people, "Moses didn't write the Pentateuch. That's why they have to make such declarations at general assemblies. Moses didn't write the Pentateuch, and all the time there is a people scattered unto the four corners of the earth who say, "Moses *rabineu*, Moses our teacher." God is carrying out his program, and even though there is not complete understanding of what he is doing, even among God's ancient people. He is carrying out his program, and we shall ultimately see the fruition of it.

If you do not know Jesus Christ, we invite you to enter the olive tree. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and in believing in him be grafted into the olive tree and partake of the root and fatness of that olive tree. May God give you grace to come.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for the privilege of Gentile salvation. We do know, Lord, part of the doctrine of the mercy of God...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]