

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson  
Romans 15:1-13  
"The Servant of the Nations"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We turn now to read the Scripture this morning and we're turning to Roman chapter 15 and reading verse 1 through verse 13. This is the third of the sections that have to do with the debatable things, or morally indifferent things and the apostle concludes that section here. And in a since, as we shall try to point out, he concludes the Epistle to the Romans in its doctrinal section. Romans chapter 15 and verse 1 for our Scripture reading, and the apostle writes,

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let everyone of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. (Paul turns to Psalm 69, a messianic psalm, and cites that psalm in support of the fact that Jesus Christ did not please himself.) For whatever things were written in earlier times were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now, the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus; That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father or our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. (The original text begins with a "for" rather than the "now" which the Authorized Version has). For I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto fathers; And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, (Now, you will notice in these verses that we read now the apostle gives us four texts from the Old Testament to support the idea that the gentiles or the nations glorify God for his mercy. He writes) as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto Thy name. And again he saith, Rejoice, ye nations, with his people. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud Him, all ye people. And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in Him (or upon Him) the nations shall hope. Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit."

May God bless this reading of his word. Our subject for this morning in the exposition of the epistle to the Romans is "The Servant of the Nations". We are coming to the third section of Paul's teaching on the morally indifferent things, or the debatable things. And the apostle has made these major points, he has pointed out that all things are pure for believers. In chapter 14 and verse 14 he said, "I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself." And then in verse 20 he says, "All things indeed are pure." The second point the apostle has desired to make and has made is all, however, do not esteem all things to be pure, and to those who do not esteem all things to be pure then to them those things that they do not esteem to be pure are unclean. He said in the fourteenth verse after saying, "There is nothing unclean of itself, but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean." And he exhorts that person not to eat when in doubt about the purity or impurity of something that he is ready to eat

or is faced with the possibility of eating. He says in the twenty-third verse, "And he that doubted is condemned if he eat because he eateth not of faith for whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

He then has made the point that the strong, who are those who do not have inhibitions and the scruples that some do about things that we eat or days that we observe, the strong who are the free are not to despise the weak, not to look down upon them because they don't have the understanding that the strong have to this point. And on the other hand, the weak who believe that certain things are wrong but may see the strong eating them or doing them, the weak are not to judge the strong as if they are using their freedom in a licentious way. The strong however, Paul has pointed out, may have to restrict their liberty to avoid wounding the conscience of the weak. And they do this out of love because it is a fact of Christian life that some of us are new Christians and may come from backgrounds in which we have certain scruples and inhibitions. And others may be more mature Christians who've come to understand Christian liberty.

Of course, as I emphasized last time, there're things that are set forth in the Bible as unclean and they are always unclean. We are talking simply about the morally indifferent things, or the debatable things. And I gave a piece of advice last time, based upon the actions of the Lord Jesus Christ, that there is a limit to the restriction that a strong person places on his liberty. It is perfectly proper and right for him out of love to restrict his liberty if there is the possibility of his wounding the conscience of a weak person who does not understand yet the freedom we have as Christians. But of course, we can confirm a legalist in his legalism if we continue that kind of activity so that finally what is right and what is wrong is determined by the most narrow and the most prejudice conscience among the believers. And we all ought to grow.

The Lord Jesus, I think, illustrates this in the way in which he treated the Sabbath. It was a day. And some observe the Sabbath very strictly and others observed it more leniently. The Lord Jesus did not hesitate to do some things on the Sabbath days that offended the weaker consciences of some of the people in his day. For example, in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke we have an illustration, I think, of this.

"It came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat on the Sabbath day, that they watched him. And behold there was a certain man before who had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spoke unto the lawyers and Pharisees saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day? And they held their peace. (They didn't believe that it was.) So he took him, and healed him, and let him go and answered them saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things."

So the Lord Jesus occasionally offended the conscience of some of the weaker individuals in order to cause them to study the Scriptures and arrive at a more accurate definition of the significance of things that were written in the word of God.

Ray Stedman is a former pupil of mine who has distinguished himself as a Christian. In his book on the Epistle to the Romans he has given an illustration of the continuing confusion over issues on which the Bible is silent in this way. He said that he had just read before he wrote his second volume that Dr. Carl McIntire, the flamboyant, fundamentalist, Presbyterian minister was now attacking Christians for going along with

the change from Fahrenheit to Celsius or centigrade. He says, "It's nothing," that is Dr. McIntire, so Mr. Stedman says, he said, "It was nothing but a sneaky communist plot to take over the world by degrees." [Laughter]

In his book Ray goes on to speak about an instance in which he applied some of these principles we are talking about. He said he had just recently visited Sacramento, California and there he talked with a man who was a teacher in a Christian school. This teacher had been asked by the school board to enforce a rule prohibiting students from wearing their hair long. Well, the teacher didn't really agree with the rule and he found himself in a serious dilemma because the board of the school told him that if he didn't enforce the rule he would lose his job. But if he did enforce it he would be violating his own conscience, and so he was very disturbed about it. And when Ray came to town he had to say a few words to him about it. He said, "I'm really between a rock and a hard place." And his plead to Ray was, "What shall I do?" Well Ray counseled him, I think rather wisely. He said, "That we should not push our ideas of liberty to the degree that they would upset the peace." And so he said to him, "For the sake of peace go along with the school board and enforce the rule for this year. But make a strong plea to the board to rethink their position and to change their views, and perhaps they will come to your views. But at the end of the year if they are unwilling to do that then perhaps you might well consider moving to a different place or getting another position, and that way you would not be upsetting things and creating a division over this particular thing. And you would also give them an opportunity to think through their own actions.

Now, I know we have some people in this auditorium who are teachers, and some of you who are principals, and you may not like that advice. But I thought that at least it was an honest attempt to apply some of the things that the Apostle Paul is speaking about here.

The crucial thing about this section that we are looking at now is the Apostle Paul brings forward the Lord Jesus Christ as an example for us. In the final analysis, who was freer from taboos and inhibitions than the Lord Jesus Christ? Who could be freer than he? Who was more considerate of the weak than the Lord Jesus Christ? And so the illustrations that are brought forward of the Lord Jesus are very significant for the Apostle's points. And I think the most crucial of his two illustrations of the Lord Jesus is found in verse 7 through verse 12 where he amplifies facts concerning the ministry of the Lord Jesus to Jews and to Gentiles. "Jesus Christ welcomed the Jews and he welcomed the Gentiles," Paul said. And furthermore, the Old Testament foresaw both as facts of his ministry.

Now, Paul is making an application of our Lord's freedom in welcoming us of strong bretheren bearing the infirmities of the weak, not pleasing themselves. So the illustration of the Lord Jesus is brought forward. I'm sure that in the background of what Paul is saying, he would have said, "This is the kind of ministry that I have had, a ministry to the Jew first and also to the Gentiles. And as an apostle of the Gentiles I've gone out preaching the Gospel, and the Gospel has gone out to them. And as Christ has received both Jews and Gentiles, we who are strong ought to receive those who are weak and bear their infirmities."

Mark Twain once said, "Few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example." "And our Lord is a good example for us," Paul would say. Well, there are two of the examples, two aspects of his exemplary conduct are brought forth

here by the apostle. And each of them is followed by a prayer, which is really a kind of aspiration, a wish. In verse 1 through verse 4, we have the personal service of our Lord followed by the prayer or expression of aspiration. And then in verse 7 through verse 12, we have the second of his illustrations, the national service of the Lord Jesus. And that, too, is followed by a prayer or an aspiration. So let's look at them. And we begin with the first verse in which the apostle exhorts the Romans to endurance. "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." We've been saying all along that the apostle classified himself with the strong. In other words, he believed that the Bible taught that we as believers have freedom in matters of eating and drinking. And there are many ways in which this may be applied, but we must of course always guard what we are saying by those express statements of Scripture in which certain issues flowing out of freedom as expressly prohibited by the word of God. It is perfectly all right, according to Paul, for a man to take a little wine. He exhorts Timothy to do that, but he is very strongly opposed to drunkenness. And consequently, the apostle's words, "For freedom is always to be bounded by those express statements of the word of God that sound forth the will of God."

But he classifies himself as one of the strong, "We then that are strong, we ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." Not simply to not despise them, not simply to restrict our liberty to some extent, but we are to bear their infirmities. We are to endure their infirmities, tolerate their infirmities. The allusion here, it seems to me, is to the servant of Jehovah in the Old Testament. In Isaiah chapter 53 and verse 4, Isaiah says, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." And so we, too, who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves. If we are Christians and we understand our freedom we shall not go out of our way to upset some of our weaker bretheren who have a number of scruples and inhibitions. Some of them have scruples concerning the Sabbath day in the present age. They feel that it is impossible to do a lot of things that other Christians feel are perfectly all right on the Lord's day. In the Old Testament, the Sabbath day was Saturday and there were certain things that they were not able to do. But now we gather on the Lord's day, the first day of the week, not the seventh day.

But there are still some who consider Sunday to be "the Sabbath". Some consider it not to be "the Sabbath" but "a" Sabbath. And the illustration of the Old Testament is to be significant for us today. Many of us grew up under those sabbatarian conditions. Now the freedom of the New Testament, in which the apostle says, "Let no man judge you with respect to Sabbath day we feel pertain to us." But we should remember that there are individuals who believe that to be free to the extent that some Christians are on the Lord's day is contrary to Holy Scripture "We then that are strong, we ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." And if we are disturbing and upsetting someone in particular we should avoid doing it, hoping of course that there may be growth, if we are right, to come to understand the freedom that we have on the first day of the week.

Then the apostle justifies this exhortation by adducing them of the Lord Jesus. He says, "For even Christ pleased not himself." Now it is remarkable, I think, the way that apostle Paul adduces as an example the Lord Jesus. And he adduces as an example his most transcended accomplishment, his greatest accomplishments, in order to commend to us the lowliest of beauties. For example, the apostle speaking in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and 9 concerning Christian giving, a very interesting and important chapter. And I think

every New Testament Christian should read 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. You would be delivered from a lot of things that are said concerning the tithe in the present day if you read this chapter. We have freedom from the tithe. Well, that does not mean, of course, we have freedom from giving. The apostle says, "We have freedom from the tithe." The tithe was an Old Testament income tax. It was not even a gift. Gifts and offerings were beyond the tithe. The tithe is like paying the IRS on April 15. Now, the apostle says the principles of giving in Christian times are quite different. We give as God has prospered us. We give measured by the mercy that he has shown to us. Our giving reflects often our understanding of the grace of God shown to us.

In the midst of his exhortations toward giving he says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich he had, for your sakes, He became poor that ye through His poverty might be enriched." And so he appeals to this transcendent accomplishment of the cross of Christ in order to encourage them in the giving of grace gifts. In Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 25, speaking to the husbands he says, "Husbands love your wives." Why? Because she's beautiful? Well, yes. Because she cooks for you? Well, [Laughter] for some yes. For some, well I don't know. Because she's a good companion. Well, yes. "But the major reason that we should love our wives," Paul says, "is we should love our lives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her". So that he refers to the greatest accomplishment of the Lord Jesus, the cross as justification for this very important maximum for husbands.

In Philippians chapter 2 when several of the ladies of the church were unable to get along with each other, the apostle exhorting them to lowliness of mind, and meekness, and consideration for one another says, "In order to enforce his advice, let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus Christ who," and I'll just sum up what he said, who was actually God but took it upon himself to become a man, and not only to become a man but to go to the cross and there on the cross at calvary gave the greatest illustration of lowliness and humility while he's submitted to death and even such a death as the death of the cross. And so he appeals to these transcendent accomplishments of the Lord Jesus, the lowest of beauties. He is not the only one, the Apostle Peter does it. In 1 Peter chapter 2 he says, "You are suffering," yes "You will face suffering. But he too faced suffering. And then he goes on to say that not only faced suffering from individuals around him, but he went to the cross and there he offered the offering by which we have the forgiveness of sins. And the writer of the epistle of the Hebrews does the same thing and so the strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not please themselves because Jesus Christ did not please Holy Spirit.

Now, for the apostle the statements of Scripture have supreme significance and so at this point he cites one of those texts. He cites Psalms 69. Now, this is a messianic psalm. It's one of those psalms that David wrote as a typical figure being an illustration of the Lord Jesus who was to come. He was the Davidic king and our Lord is the Davidic king. David spoke of his experiences, his persecutions, the reproaches that were laid upon him because he represented Yahweh. And David wrote, "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on me," because I was standing for you. And so in criticizing Yahweh they criticized David. David stood as his representative. And just as every Christian ultimately, if he gives a good testimony to the doctrine of the word of God, it can be said of them that the reproaches of them that reproached God fell on us for when we identify with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ we are reproached for our Gospel

because it is really his Gospel. And there are reproaches that are ultimately directed toward God. When a man denies that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, as we proclaim him this, he is really reproaching the Lord God for that fact has been revealed in Holy Scripture. When he says that it is not necessary for us to believe in a Christ of the cross in order to be saved but to do simply good works, to join a church or whatever it may be in order to be saved. Well the reproaches fall on us but they are the reproaches that ultimately are traceable to God because it is he who is the author of this doctrine. "So the reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on me," David said. And Paul looks at this as the Lord Jesus ultimately speaking. "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on me."

This psalm was quoted by the early church often. You'll find it referred to often in the New Testament. And they interpreted it as having to do with the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ and the retribution that would fall on those who were crucifying him and saying these things about him. It's one of the imploratory psalms. And so when in the midst of his passion and sufferings they cried out, "Save yourself. Come down from the cross." Or when they made other slanders with reference to him, it was really reproach of his God for Jesus was doing simply the will of God. And the reproaches of him have fallen upon me, the Lord said.

Now that is an evidence of the fact that the Lord Jesus did not live for self-gratification. He lived in order to do the will of God. And the supreme expression of it is his obedience to the will of the father which led to the cross amid the persecution, and the slander, and the reproaches of men who ultimately hung him on the tree and nailed him to the cross in order that God might through this make him an offering for sin and for sinners.

Now, Paul says, it's very proper for us to appeal to the Scriptures because whatsoever things were written beforehand were written for our admonition or learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. The Scriptures are given to provide the power for us to endure temptation and afflictions. I guess if I were to look back over my thirty-five years of preaching and teaching, if I were to be asked, "What is the greatest disappointment you have ever experienced in the ministry of the word?" I would say, "It is the disappointment of individuals, some of whom have listened to me preach for twenty-five years around the city of Dallas who still do not it seems go to the word of God for the comfort and consolation promised in Holy Scripture." The Scriptures are given to provide us with the power to endure temptation and afflictions. But when we come into the midst of temptations and afflictions, do we go the word? Is that our first activity always? Do we go to the word? And do we go to the word with the sense that the Scriptures are sufficient for our needs? Or, do we rather go to our Christian friends? Do we sometimes appeal in prayer to the Lord, bypassing the Bible? Do we go to Christian counselors? Do we go to the elders and deacons? Do we go to psychologist and psychiatrists? I know I'm hitting home because I know a lot of you do just that. But the Scriptures have been given to us to give us power to endure temptation and afflictions.

Naturally, being on the radio a good bit now and through the many tapes that are sent out I get a lot of letters that have to do with problems that individuals have. This past week I received a rather thick letter from a young man who is attending a Bible college at the present moment and intends to go on to theological seminary. He says that

he's come to understand the doctrine of the sovereign grace of God. And he's managed to make progress in his Christian life, but he's had one particular sin that has troubled him and troubled him for a long period of time, and he does not seem to get any victory over it. Of course, it's a measure of growth that he understands the nature of the problem and perhaps he's more on the way to getting the victory than he realizes. But he wrote me, it's in the Scriptures that we have the power to endure temptation and afflictions. It's in them that he will find his greatest source of comfort.

Yesterday, someone called me about another person who has a problem that seems to have overmastered that person. And while, of course, I'm delighted to have the opportunity to pray for someone like that, I think that the solution to our problems is found in the Holy Scriptures. And the one piece of advice that I think is most fruitful is the word of God. "Whatsoever was written aforetime was written for our admonition that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope," and it's in the word of God that we have our deliverance for the Holy Spirit works through the word.

If I were to say to you, "You can live your life in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, the personal presence of the Lord Jesus." Do you think that would make a difference in your daily life? Do you think that if the Lord Jesus were here personally and you were able to live with him, let us say in the same home with him, day by day, from morning to night, would your life be different? Well, most of you would say, "Yes. My life would be considerably different." Well, do you not know that through the word of God you have that privilege? You have the privilege of being with our Lord Jesus as he preached the great sermon the mount, to be with him on the little boat on the sea of Galilee when the storms came, to be with him as he went toward Calvary, to be with him as he hung there, to be with him in his resurrection. All of these are privileges that are ours. And if we spend time in Holy Scripture, immersing ourselves in the word of God, it is in these experiences and in this edification that we are strengthened to face the things that we face in our daily life. He is with us through the Holy Spirit, given to everyone of us. It is the Holy Spirit's duty and responsibility, and he carries it out, to bring to us the personal presence of the Lord Jesus from morning until night, magnificent privilege that we have.

Well, the apostle follows that up with a prayer for unanimity. He says, "I want you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus." Now, I don't think he's talking about unanimity in doctrine primarily, of course, that would be great if we were all Calvinists like I am. Well, then we would all be much happier, [Laughter] and we'd certainly be happier with each other. But it's probable that the apostle is not thinking about that but rather about unanimity in disposition in action, to be likeminded toward one another according to Christ Jesus. The strong bearing the infirmities of the weak, and the weak not judging the strong, and together bringing glory to the name of the Lord Jesus as we together grow in likeness to him.

Now, at the end of that prayer of aspiration the apostle speaks of the service of our Lord to the nations. This is another illustration. Verse 7, "Wherefore," that is, "That this unanimous praise might be given to the Lord God. Wherefore, receive ye one another as Christ receive you to the glory of God." That "us" is more likely to be "you" in text of the New Testament. He came not to receive but to give service, and he came to give service to Israel, and he came to give service to the nations.

Now, let's look at this for a few moments. When the apostle says, "Receive one another," he probably means receive one another into the communion and fellowship of the Lord's table because that was the expression of corporate communion in the early church. When the church came together to observe the Lord's supper that was the communion. That was the thanksgiving. And it was there that they were to be received, the strong and the weak to be received on by the other because Jesus Christ perceived Israel, or the circumcision. He also received the nations.

Now, look at the manner of our Lord's service. We read in verse 7, after he has said that he's received us to the glory of God now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of circumcision for the truth of God.

Now, I want to make just a final point here, but I think it's of some significance. The Authorized Version says, "Now, I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision." The circumcision is an expression the apostle has used back in chapter 3 and there by "the circumcision" he made reference to the nation Israel. "The circumcision," what advantage does the circumcision have? He means Israel. Here the "the" is missing in the original text and the apostle is probably not so much speaking of "the" nation as the rite of circumcision which was the sign of seal of the Abrahamic covenant that is related to the nation Israel, but he's not specifically speaking of them. He's saying that the Lord Jesus Christ or that Christ was a minister of circumcision. That is he came as a servant and he came as a servant of that rite, circumcision. Men were to be circumcised on the eighth day. What did that mean? Well, that meant that they were outwardly a member of the nation to whom the Abrahamic covenant had been given. It meant that they were children of that covenant. Now, Abraham had been justified by faith apart from any kind of rite. But in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis after his justification by faith, he was given the rite of circumcision and he was told that all male Israelites were to be circumcised on the eighth day. That marked them out as having the sign and seal of a righteousness given by God. Now of course, they had to believe in order to really possess it, but the outward sign was circumcision.

Now, it was such a widely known fact that Israel came to be known as "the circumcision" that is the group of people who practice this rite. So when Paul says that Jesus Christ was a minister of circumcision he's saying, of course, that he came as a minister of the Abrahamic promises, and he came as a minister of the Abrahamic promises in order to, as he goes on to say, confirm them.

Now, I think that if we're looking in other parts of Paul's words for passages that were parallel to this we would think of Galatians chapter 4, "In the fullness of time God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under law, that he might redeem those under the law that they might receive the adoption of sons." So he was a minister of circumcision for the truth of God. What does that mean? Why in order to be faithful to the truth of God, "for the truth of God," he came in response to all of those Old Testament promises and carried them out. Now, God says that his word will always accomplish the purpose for which he has given. And he gave all of those messianic promises through the Old Testament. From the opening promise of the seed of the woman to the concluding promise of the Old Testament about the son of righteousness who would arise with healing his wing, the Lord Jesus Christ gathered all of them up in his ministry and fulfilled them in his death upon the cross. "For the truth of God," for the faithfulness of God to his promises. Therefore, whenever you rely upon the word of God



that promise will be fulfilled. He does not say when. There were thousands of years between the first promise and the fulfillment. Time is immaterial with God. He has his reasons for his delays, but they will be fulfilled. He is not a God who can be frustrated. He is not confused in what he does. He is not frustrated at all. We get frustrated. We wonder. We complain. We ask questions. But he's just carrying out his purposes regardless of all of these little people who are snapping at his heels like so many little dogs at a giant man walking through the presence of humanity.

Now, he says, "Jesus Christ was a minister of circumcision to confirm the promises made unto the fathers." He came in order to establish by his incarnation, by his death, by his resurrection those promises. The promise that Abraham's name would be great, that he would have a land and his seed would have a land, and also that in him would all the nations of the earth be blessed. In other words, he came that Israel as a nation might possess their promises and through Israel all the families of the earth be blessed. Not every individual, but individuals from all parts of the nations of the earth. Not everybody without exception, but everyone without distinction. And so those promises were fulfilled, confirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, one might have thought that the apostle would stop here, but after all the Romans are now primarily Gentiles. And so he goes on to say in the ninth verse, "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy." Now, let me say something there plainly to you. The Gentiles had no direct promises. Their promises were promises that were to come to them through the nation Israel, through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, through the fathers. Our promises are not direct. They are indirect. Now, of course, they are direct in the sense that they become just as much ours, but they are indirect in the sense that they come through Israel. And so the Lord Jesus is a minister of circumcision of the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the fathers that, "the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy." Now, this is so beautifully illustrated in the ministry of the Lord Jesus that I'm often surprised that people don't see this. But it's because we don't pay attention the national purposes of God.

There was a Syro-Phoenician woman who came to the Lord Jesus one day and she said, "My daughter is grievously vexed with a demon. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou son of David." You would think that that would be prayer that would be answered but she was a Gentile. He didn't even answer her a word, not a word. You say, "Is the Lord Jesus a kind of person who does not care for people? He didn't even bother to answer her." Well, the disciples got a little disturbed about her keep saying, "Have mercy upon me." They said, "Lord, send her away. She's troubling us." And he said, "I'm not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Isn't that amazing? "I'm not sent for Syro-Phoenicians. I'm sent for the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And then she came and she said, "Lord, help me."

I read a most interesting story this past week in the Presbyterian Journal, a magazine that I take about a farmer who was a man who had an awful temper many years ago. And there was a country preacher that came through the community all the time and it was generally the custom in this community to gather together and have meetings. And they would have him in the various homes. And there was a man who was speaking years later who said, "I did not want him to come to our house because my papa had the most horrible temper that any man ever had." And sooner or later he would come, and sooner or later he would display his temper. And he usually reacted to provocations with

knockout blows and volleys of scathing multi-syllable curse words capable of wilting any creature that dared defy his authority. He said he hated for the time when that preacher would come to visit his house and his was just a kid, and he was not converted either. But he said one glorious night during the meetings his father was converted. But he said, "I didn't believe it until the provocations came." And he said he waited. And said all year after the meetings were closed and spring came on, he listened from behind the barn, he peeked down from the hayloft, he hung around the tool shed in the cow barn. He waited for papa's temper to be triggered by a cow that happened to step on his foot or switch a rough, hairy tail across his face. And still, no temper. And then came the spring plowing. And he said that he happened to look from behind a clump of bushes at his father and his father was plowing and the mule balked. And he said, "Get up." And he knew that this father had to finish the plowing. And he said his father roared at the mules, "Get up." He said they just rolled their eyes at him and stood still. He said he watched. He said he saw his father open his mouth getting ready utter the curses. Then he saw him close it. They saw his father stride over to edge of the field and there he cut down a big limb and he was going back to [the] mule. And he said, "He's really going to beat that mule now." And he said when he got back in he got in back again behind that mule. And he said, "Get up," and that mule didn't do anything. And said then he did a surprising thing. He said he got out of the plow, got down on the ground, dropped to the knees in the soil and lifted his voice in prayer. He said there were no fiery phrases. He said what he said was, "God, you know I've got to finish this plowing today. You can see that these mules are balking. God, I can't beat them up or cuss them like I used to [Laughter] because I'm your child now. God, I've got to have help. Would you please make these mules go away? Amen." And he said he watched his father get up, pick up the reins and said one word, "Get up." And the mules went. He said years later when he was an old man he told that story with the tears coming down his face and he said, "I knew that salvation had come to our house, that that salvation was real, not because the mules went but because he prayed instead of cursing."

Well, you can imagine the Lord Jesus now in the midst of the Syro-Phoenician woman and the Syro-Phoenician woman finally says, "Lord, help me." Mark tells us in his account that Jesus said, "Let the children first be filled [inaudible46:58]. It's not right to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs." Dogs, Gentiles, dogs. And then the woman in a magnificent burst of faith said, "True Lord, we are the dogs, we Gentiles. But the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters table." She took her place as a Gentile to be blessed through Israel. And Jesus said, "Oh woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." And her daughter was made well from that very hour. That's what Paul means when he says that Jesus Christ was a minister of circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the father, and that the Gentiles should glorify God for mercy.

Do you know my dear friend, most of Gentiles in this audience, do you know why you have been saved? Well, God has opened up his wonderful grace to Gentiles because the nation Israel and that generation was disobedient and turned their backs upon him, did not come to him. And they have been suffering the discipline of God since, scattered to the four corners of the earth.

But why have you been saved? Well, saved as a manifestation of the grace and mercy of God, yes mercy. Paul in Romans 11 speaks of that. But there he reminds us

that we are still the unnatural branches. They are the natural branches. "And if the unnatural branches have been grafted in, how much more shall the natural branches be grafted in again," Paul says. Why have you Gentiles been saved? "In order that you might provoke Israel to jealousy." That's what Paul says. Romans 11, Deuteronomy chapter 32, that is why we have been saved, to be the means of the provocation of Israel to jealousy that they as a nation might be saved, that the blessing of God might go to the four corners of the earth. Humbling isn't it? That's our place. They glorify God for his faithfulness to his word. We glorify God for his mercy.

Now, the apostle supports that with four passages from the Old Testament that express the salvation of Gentiles. He's talking about the present day, and in the context of those passages he speaks about the present day. Gentiles are being saved to provoke Israel to jealousy.

The last one is a significant messianic passage from Isaiah chapter 11, "There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the nations; in Him shall the nations trust." He's the shoot from David's stock. The royal stock itself has been cut down, but he's the shoot out of it that's ultimately to be the means by which the nations and nations glorify God. And incidentally, hope in Christ is the proof of the divinity or deity of the Lord Jesus.

Well, Paul's section concludes with a great prayer of aspiration. In him the Gentiles shall hope. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." This is the climax of the epistle to the Romans and this statement "in believing" recalls the central theme of the book, that men are justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and justified in the sense that when they believe and him they are given a righteousness that is acceptable to God. "So may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, and that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit." Here is a prayer of aspiration that begins with God and ends with God the Holy Spirit. The accent is on the divine agency and the divine resources.

May God, if we never get anything from the epistle to the Romans, get the central fact that it is through faith in this God that we have the energy and the resources for not only believing but for the meeting of all of our needs. May God help us to give ourselves to the Scriptures which give us comfort and hope through Jesus Christ.

If you're here today and you've never believed in him, we invite you to come to Christ who has offered the atoning sacrifice for sinners, sinners of the Jews, sinners of the Gentiles, and through whom you may have the righteousness that is acceptable to God. Acknowledging your sin and your guilt and leaning in recompense upon Jesus Christ as the hope, you shall be saved. May God give you grace to come.

[Prayer] We rejoice Lord in these wonderful promises given to us in Holy Scripture. It humbles us Lord to realize that we, the nations, are not first in the thoughts of God. But we rejoice in the mercy shown to us and in the faithfulness to the promises shown in the dealings that though hast had and will have with the nation Israel. For Thou art our God and we rejoice in all of the attributes that exhibit Thou perfection.