

GOD WORKS THROUGH HIS MERCY

Romans 11:1-36 (key 11:32)

“For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”

Last week we learned about how does one become saved. The focus was on the response of the person, whether you believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord and secondly that God raised Jesus from the dead. In today’s passage apostle Paul reveals that, ultimately God works through his mercy to save a sinner. In other words to find yourself believing in Jesus as your lord, is all because of the mercy of God. Moreover, Paul reveals a principle through this passage. That God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. In other words, God has permitted sin so that he may show his mercy to the sinner. Your understanding of the merits or reason for your salvation matters to how you respond to God and to others. Firstly, we either become arrogant and judgemental of others or you are filled with praise before God. Secondly, we either become hopeless of those around us who appear rebellious and unbelieving towards God? Do we feel hopeless for their salvation? May the lord through this passage. Firstly, help us have a sense of praise towards who He is, and secondly, help us place our hope in His mercy for our salvation and the salvation of others even to those we feel the situation is hopeless. Because God works through his mercy, Amen!

Following from the previous passages it was becoming clear that Israel rejected Jesus and were seeking a salvation that was based on works. The situation seemed dire because God had chosen Israel for the sole purpose of revealing to the world that there is but one true living God. However, now it seemed as though this very chosen nation is the one that was rejecting the true living God. Look at verse 1, “I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.” Paul himself was a living testimony. He experienced God’s grace and came to believe in Jesus as his lord and saviour. To further prove his point that God did not reject his people, he uses another story from the time of Isaiah in verses 2-4. Isaiah cried, “Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me”? 4And what was God’s answer to him? “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” Just like In Paul’s time it appeared as though there was no hope for the whole of Israel since they had rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah. It appeared a hopeless situation because their hearts were hard to believe in God provided grace [7a]. Rather Israel sought so earnestly to obtain righteousness by works instead of depending on the grace of God [5]. We also read in verse 8, that God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear.

Because if righteousness could be achieved through works then God’s grace would no longer be grace. However, It is by grace because Jesus died for us while we were sinners. In actuality there was no work that we could do to cleanse ourselves of sin. And so just like in Isaiah times it appeared as though there was no hope for Israel because they had killed all the prophets of God. David also once said about them in verse 9, “May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. 10May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever” this is because they would gather at their table to continue discussing and indulging in things that were not pleasing to God. Continuing to make their hearts hard instead of considering the word of God with fear. They continued to ignore the grace of God but rather focused on their work based salvation. They continued to do their own things instead of submitting to the authority of God. This really appeared to be a hopeless situation for Israel as a nation. However just like in the time of Isaiah which also appeared hopeless, God response was, “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed to the knew of Baal.” This was God’s remnant who had received salvation by grace through the mercy of God. Though Isaiah was not aware of them because they were a small number relative to the whole nation. However, God was working even in that seemingly hopeless situation. The lord through his mercy had raised a remnant for himself. We too may sometimes feel like Isaiah, feeling as though God has failed in his salvation plan because of the terrible things we see and feel in this world. However, we should take heart since God is raising a remnant, because God works though His mercy. We can be hopeful because God’s mercy triumph over judgement [James 2:13].

However, what about the many of others, whose hearts had become hardened by their sin and unbelieving. Are they lost forever? Look at verse 11-12, “Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. 12But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!” Their hearts will not be hardened forever, there is still

hope for Israel. The disobedience of Israel resulted in God's mercy being extended to the Gentiles in order to make Israel envious. Paul goes on to reveal God's greater work. That if the rebellion of Israel towards God resulted in the Gentiles coming into the faith, how much more greater work of God for world salvation if Israel repented and came to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and saviour.

Paul then shifts his attention to the Gentiles from verses 13-27. That as much as Israel became proud as the chosen nation and ended up hardening their hearts through unbelief, the Gentiles should not make the same mistake. From verse 13-16, Paul shows the gentiles that he hopes to somehow arouse Israel into envy in order to save some of them. Because their rejection brought salvation to the gentiles, it could only mean greater work of God to the world if they could repent and be reconciled to God. Look at verse 16, "If the part of the dough offered as first-fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches." The branches here are the Israelites and the roots are the patriarchs, their forefathers whom God had made his covenants with. Look at verse 17 – 18, "If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you." Paul made it clear to the Gentiles that, they should never become proud, arrogant or superior that they were in the faith while majority of Israel had fallen into unbelief, the branches that were broken off. Rather they should actually tremble in fear because if God did not even spare people born out of the patriarchs, born out of the covenant, he would also not spare them if they fell into unbelief [19-21]. Their salvation is because of the work God through His mercy. This is very important for those who are in the faith especially for leaders. It is easy to feel superior over others, however may we remember that we are all saved because of the mercy of God. Likewise, the same mercy will be extended to Israel if they do not continue in unbelief because God is able to bring them back to the main tree supported by the roots of the faithful patriarchs [22-24].

Paul reveals that right here there is a God's mystery at work, that we can actually learn one of God's principles. Verse 25 reveals that, Israel experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles had been saved. From that time Israel will then be saved. One day Israel will ultimately believe in Jesus as their Lord and saviour [26-27]. Because God's gift and calling is irrevocable [28-29]. This is all because of the promises and covenant the Lord made with the Patriarchs. For example In Genesis 12:1-3, "God promised Abraham that He would multiply his descendants as the stars in the sky." And his descendants we learned are those who follow in his faith.

Let us all read verse 30 -32, "Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. **32For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.**" There seems to be consistent principle of God here, God's mercy activated through disobedience. Paul begins with the Gentiles, that just as they were at one time disobedient to God, but now have received mercy as a result of their disobedience. Secondly, it is now Israel that have become disobedient so that they too may receive mercy. Therefore, either Jew or Gentile, God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. What looks like a hopeless situation based on human standards is actually God's plan to show mercy and save the sinner. In other words God allowed sin to happen so that he may show mercy and save the sinner. The disobedient or the sinner is then saved but nothing else but God's mercy. As Paul said in verse 6, "6And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace." That even the remnant are saved by grace. For it was by works then it would not be by His mercy but rather on merit.

The hardening of man's heart through unbelief is not permanent, but temporary. More so it is so that they may experience the mercy of God. We are all in the faith because of the mercy of God. We too were once upon a time living as we wished. We were self proclaimed masters of our own destiny. We were dead in our sin, ignorant and feeding our pride with good works for self righteousness. Unbelief made us think we can be ok with good morals and striving to do what is good to others whereas rejecting the author of life Jesus Christ. And this is the deception the Devil presents to all of us, making us believe we are all alright on our own, as long as we can work hard to do good and live by good morals. Whereas the truth is that we cannot even live up to our very own standards because of sin that lives in us. Now we world has fallen prey to make believe. How a person feels becomes truth. If I feel like a white person I am then white and everyone was see me as white. If I feel like a woman I should not be referred to as a man or

a he. Children are given the right to costly operations to change their gender whereas all along it was only at a particular age they could be allowed to override parental guidance [Example of the man who made operation to become a woman]. Truth is actually above all of us, that is why Jesus says I am the way, the truth and the life. As much as the Devil tries to deceive and distort God's truth. God is creator of the Universe and it is through Him that we can learn the order of his creation. For in all of this unbelieve in the world, from our family members to our friends, student colleagues and work colleagues.

God is in control wiser and merciful than anything we can ever imagine in this world. In fact there is nothing that can match the wisdom and mercy of God in the universe. Lamentation 3:22-23 says [from the KJV], "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. 23They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." I really pray that this may pant hope in your hearts, because it does in my heart. That there is hope for salvation for anyone most especially those people we had even lost or were starting to loose hope on. Seeing them year in and year out, you have been sharing the gospel with them, trying to teach the word of God. Yet still all you were getting was a brick wall, worse part a stone cold response and to some extent insults to God. Verse 32 says, "**For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.**" We can only pray for God's mercy because, God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. This means that seeing disobedience even within ourselves, should not lead us to hopelessness but rather to place our hope in God who is merciful to the disobedient. Let us have faith that God will work through His mercy to open the eyes and grow the faith of unbelieve.

One of our young relative still in high school, had been raised and taken care of his grandmother. However sometime this year his grandmother past way. He had also been indulging in drugs and performing poorly at school. Countless times they had been talking to him to improve his grades at school and to stop making use of drugs. Each time when I met him he would promise he would do well in his grades. Now his grandmother passed on due to illness. Still he has continued to steal and be stubborn in living life the way he wants. Many of his family members are concerned about him, he is very young and everyone wants what is best for his future. However, he stubbornly lives in his own world of unbelieve. His heart appears hard as a rock even worse. Everyone can see where his life is headed if he continues to be disobedient and it pains all of us. A sense of hopeless tends to come seeing how he behaves and how smart he has become in saying what others want to hear. [Am sure many of us can relate]. But deep down in his heart is filled with readiness to be disobedient. Preparing this message has given me some sense of hope, that God had bound him into disobedience so that he may have mercy on him. My hope is now in God, who can have mercy on him so he may be saved. I pray that I may view everyone in light of God's mercy even myself. May I never fool myself to think that I have come to the faith by any other means but through the mercy of God. I was also once upon a time disobedient. Living the way I saw fit for myself. But one day the Lord prompted some two young men to come to our home and preach the gospel. Though it was not what they preached but their forgetting of their bible at my home that led to my salvation. Through God's mercy I got prompted to study that bible each day and grow faith in my heart. The Lord could then convict me of my unbelieve and disobedience to repent and come to the faith. This does not am fully obedient or perfect, however I am God's work in progress, God is continuing to work through His mercy In my life so I may one day meet Jesus Christ without shame. If God could show me mercy, a mere sinner, with nothing to show but pride filthy sin, I have reason to have hope for others however disobedient and stubborn they may be. I pray that I may continue to pray for them, so that as God has shown me mercy. The Lord would also extend His mercy. The Lord has bound them over to disobedience so that he may have mercy. When I see disobedience I should not resort to helplessness but rather count on God's mercy.

This also means that we cannot simply be judgemental of others who are sill disobedient to believing in Jesus Christ. Rather we should tremble with fear knowing that we are in the faith because of the mercy of God. Same time we rejoice because we did not obtain what we deserve which is God's judgement due to our sin. But rather eternal life, all because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. This is the revealed merciful work of God to me and you. For what did did on the cross and what he is continuing to do is the revealed work of God's mercy. May we live with greater hope and joy knowing that God works through His mercy. Amen!

In conclusion, I would like to conclude with the doxology, which is an expression of praise to God. This is because I find no best way of expressing how awesome our God is. Because in this world we may feel and think all is doom and gloom because even the church seems to be falling into the influence of society and relativism. However, today's passage has given us one of God's mysteries. That even in the mist of what looks hopeless, out of his great mercy, God is raising a remnant for his own Glory. That **God has bound**

everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. God's goal is not judgement but rather mercy. Someone may then ask, why does God work through his mercy? The answer is twofold, so that His name is glorified and we may enjoy Him forever. Let us all praise God through verses 33-36, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 34"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?" 35"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?" 36For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen." [example from a movie called the Country Priest]