

Romans 11: 13-36 with Mat 15:10-28 Who can know the mind of God? 16/08/26

Prayer:

³³ 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 counselor?”

³⁵ “Who has ever given to God,

that God should repay them?”

³⁶ For from him and through him and for him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Come and behold Him

The One and the Only

Cry out, sing holy

Forever a Holy God

Come and worship the Holy God

As we come to try and understand Paul’s writings in Romans 11 today let us remember who we are before God, that there are things too wonderful for us, that some things will be unfathomable, but let’s ask the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us, to counsel us and to give us peace where we are unsure, and to trust in God, for as we read in Isaiah 55...

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,

neither are your ways my ways,”

declares the Lord.

⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth,

so are my ways higher than your ways

and my thoughts than your thoughts.

I am not going to pretend to fully understand and try to explain to you everything that Paul is saying in Romans 11. Theologians much more qualified than I have differing views on this passage regarding the future of Israel. Paul says all Israel will be saved, but he also said in Romans 9 that not all descendants of Israel are Israel. We do not know it all.

In the first 11 chapters of Romans Paul has been giving a very comprehensive account of the gospel. And at the end of this section it seems he pauses, remembering to worship the God of all creation. Analysis and argument, says John Stott, must give way to adoration, humble wonder and dependence on the God who we must give glory, for from him and through him and for him are all things.

We give thanks to God for the wonderful message we have been hearing from Paul, his wonderful plan of salvation through his Son Jesus, for his love and grace, mercy and compassion.

Paul has spoken of how through Jesus' death and resurrection our sins are forgiven and we have new and eternal life in him, reconciled to God for all eternity. He has been clear that this is a gift of grace, there is nothing that we can do to earn it, not by works and keeping the law, but by grace and through faith.

As we heard last week, we need to believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord. Paul has been so affirming of our position of freedom, of no condemnation for those who put their trust in and follow Jesus. The future is sure for believers, though what that fully looks like we can't comprehend – but it will be a glorious transformation for us and the whole world.

In these last couple of chapters, we have heard of Paul's grief and longing for his Jewish brothers and sisters to come to faith in Christ, rather than depending on their own righteousness in following the law; while confirming that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – that all who believe in Jesus are adopted into his family.

He is so distressed that so many of his fellow Israelites are blinded to the truth that Jesus is the promised Messiah, just like he had been prior to meeting Jesus. They are self-righteous and more concerned with keeping the law and putting burdens on themselves and others.

They fail to see that Jesus has come to fulfil the law. In our gospel reading from Matthew 15 today we read that the Pharisees were offended at Jesus' teaching as he challenged the purity and dietary laws. *What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth...*

What we eat, how we clean our hands or do dishes does not keep us clean. It is Jesus who cleanses us, and with his Spirit dwelling in us there should be an inner spiritual transformation going on to make us purer...like Jesus. Our thoughts, our language our conversations – what is in our thoughts and come out of our mouths should be loving, encouraging, edifying.

The second half of our gospel reading from Matthew 15 is an illustration of Paul's teaching on the fact that Gentiles are very much blessed and accepted as they believe and put their trust in Jesus as Lord. However I've always found this passage on the Canaanite woman a bit disturbing as Jesus seems out of character, initially ignoring her and speaking rudely!

He and his disciples had crossed into Gentile country in the region of Tyre and Sidon and it seems Jesus' fame had gone before him. Unlike the Jewish pharisees who were offended

and didn't recognise Jesus as their Saviour; this woman (we don't know her name) calls out to him as Lord – she recognises him as King – *Son of David*- she calls him as she cries out for mercy on her daughter.

The disciples urge him to send her away. He doesn't do this but does comment that he was sent to the lost sheep of Israel. This does not put this Canaanite woman off, who comes and kneels before him as you would before a King, and again calls him Lord and asks for help.

He then says the line that we might cringe at and feel uncomfortable with, *It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs*. Jews often referred to Gentiles as dogs, unclean like wild dogs, as they didn't follow the purity laws of the Jews.

Again, rather than being deterred, she responds saying that even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table. She is so humble before the Master and has such faith and perseverance. She knows that Jesus is the one who can heal her daughter.

As we heard from Paul in Romans 10 last week, *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*. She has called out Lord have mercy, Lord help. Jesus applauds her faith and her daughter is healed.

While his initial mission was to the Jews, it was soon to be clear that Jesus had come to save everyone. Many of the lost sheep of Israel, fail to follow him, but the Gentiles are welcomed to a place at the table, not just the crumbs, as they believe in him.

Paul's mission is especially to the Gentiles, calling himself an apostle to the Gentiles, but he always went to the synagogues first, though was generally rejected and persecuted. We have heard of his distress and longing for them to know Jesus, just as we long for our loved family members to come to faith if they don't follow Jesus.

Today we heard of his further thoughts regarding the situation of his Israelite brothers and sisters who have rejected Christ.

He is assured that God has not rejected them as they have him, he has hope in a remnant of believers, like himself and he knows that no-one, not even those who have stumbled over Christ and seem stuck in their stubbornness, are beyond recovery and rescue.

For God's mercy and love for them is great, and there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

But they must call on the name of the Lord Jesus to be saved. They must believe in their hearts and confess with their mouths, just like the rescued Gentiles who have now been grafted into the Olive tree (the family of God), while the unbelieving Jews have been broken off.

His hope is that one day the unbelieving Jews will believe and be grafted back on also.

Paul even hopes that the unbelieving Jews may become envious when they look at Paul and his ministry to the Gentiles and the blessings they are now receiving from God. But he also warns the Gentiles, and that includes us, not feel superior, not to boast or gloat over the fact that we are now in God's family, co-heirs with Jesus, while many others remain cut off in unbelief.

As I encouraged you the other week – pray for those you love to come to know Jesus, to accept his gift of love and grace and mercy. Pray for our Jewish brothers and sisters for the veil to be lifted from their eyes that they may see Jesus as their Messiah. Pray for those of other faiths, or no faith. May we use our beautiful feet to be bearers of good news. To tell of the greatness of God's mercy for all.

When we find ourselves getting bogged down in tricky passages of scripture, when we have doubts, questions, grief, misunderstandings; then like Paul may we pause and remember who God is and come bow down before the only Holy one. Remember that we are not God, for who can know the mind of the Lord, we are not his counsellor, he is ours; he is the one rich in wisdom and knowledge, in blessings and mercy and grace, kindness and compassion.

For from him and through him and for him are all things to him be the glory forever!