

Dear Heavenly Father,

Praise

Paul said, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” (Rom 11:33, 36). I praise you today as the all-wise God, the God who works all things after the counsel of your will (Eph 1:11). In wisdom, you consigned all to disobedience, that you may have mercy *on all* (Rom 11:32)! Hallelujah!

Today in Your Word

Today you shared with me the third part of Paul’s letter to the church in Rome. After celebrating the peace and reconciliation that comes from faith in Christ, Paul was painfully reminded of the fact that the majority of his own people, the Jews, were not saved. It was tragic that a people who had been so blessed were missing out on the salvation you promised Abraham, and Paul was willing, as it were, to be cut off himself if that would bring Israel to repentance. What a challenging example of loving your enemies, for the Jews did the most to hinder Paul’s mission! However, as Paul went on to say, Israel’s lack of faith did not mean that your Word had failed, because your promise was to the Israel of faith, not ethnic Israel (Rom 9:6–7). This meant that physical descent *did not* equal participation in the promised blessing of salvation. Was this unjust? By no means! You are free to grant mercy as you choose, and by granting mercy to all (Rom 11:32), you showed that participation in the promised blessing has nothing to do with human effort (Rom 9:16). That being said, I *am* accountable for my sin, for you created me as a free agent, and I’m responsible for my decisions (Rom 9:19–23). Your desire was to call both Jews and Gentiles out of sin to be your people (Rom 9:24–26), and you provided access to the promised blessing *by faith in Jesus Christ*, not by works of the law (Rom 9:32). This is precisely where the Jews went wrong, for they sought to establish their own righteousness through law-keeping rather than seeking your righteousness by faith. The law had a righteousness that led to life in the sense that those who kept the law avoided the death that was threatened to law-breakers, but *it never offered spiritual life*. Rather, it testified to the fact that spiritual righteousness and life comes by faith alone (Rom 10:5–13). Israel could not plead ignorance on this point, for the gospel had been preached to them by the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles. Isaiah made it clear that the people heard and understood the message that would have saved them, but they refused to believe (Isa 53:1; 65:2). Did their unbelief mean that God had rejected his people? By no means! There was even now a remnant of believing Jews who participated in the promised blessing by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The majority *were* hardened as they resisted the gospel, but God had used that very resistance as a means to bring salvation to the Gentiles! Indeed, Paul made a point of magnifying his ministry as apostle to the Gentiles, “in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them” (Rom 11:14). So it was that the Jews’ rejection of Christ meant the reconciliation of the world to you (Rom 11:15). This implied that the Gentiles should not be arrogant of their inclusion in the olive tree of believing Israel, for even though unbelieving branches were broken off and they were grafted in, they too would be cut off if they did not continue by faith in your kindness. “If God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you” (Rom 11:21). Paul then revealed a mystery, that a partial hardening had come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles had come in, “and in this way all Israel would be saved” (Rom 11:25–26). This meant that Israel and the Gentiles would take turns on the stage of your historical-salvation drama, and in the last days, Israel would be brought into the Kingdom by faith in Christ. This knowledge gave Paul hope, and he concluded with praise to you for your great wisdom. Praise the Lord!

Reflection

Paul told the Gentiles, “Do not become proud, but fear” (Rom 11:20). Do I take Paul’s words seriously? Am I showing gratitude for your kindness by living a life of holiness and obedience?

Request

Father, give me a burden for the lost like the apostle Paul. Help me to give and serve and sacrifice all I can in order to bring others into the glorious light of your Kingdom.

Thanksgiving

Thank you for the riches of your grace and kindness to me! To you be the glory forever!

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Suggested Hymn: “How Shall They Hear” – Michael A. Perry.

Meditation Verse: Romans 10:9.