



The Big Picture

Lesson 15 | Romans 11:25-36

Mosaics are beautiful, but only once you take a step back and see the whole picture. If you insist on standing up close to it and looking at a single tile, you will miss the beauty that the artist wanted you to see. In a similar way, we have spent weeks looking at each of the individual pieces of the gospel. We have gone verse by verse looking carefully at the different doctrines that make up the “good news” of what Jesus has done for us. But in this lesson, our goal will be to finish up chapter 11 and then take a step back and look at everything we have studied so far.

As we think through the past few weeks, what has been one thing you have learned that has been particularly helpful?

As Paul gets to the end of his presentation of the gospel to the church at Rome, he concludes with where he sees everything headed. What future does God have in store? What will the end of His program look like? God had promised to bless the world through the Jews, but the Jews had rejected His plan. Despite this, the good news of Jesus had gone out to the world, and now the Gentiles were accepting it. So is God done with Israel? Paul’s answer to this question finishes out his presentation of the gospel and points back to the all-wise God. As Paul concludes this beautiful section, he explodes into a doxology of praise to God for His unsearchable knowledge and wisdom.

Why do you think Paul focuses specifically on the wisdom of God as he transitions for explanation to praise?

Besides wisdom, what other attributes of God could we praise God for as we meditate on the gospel?

God’s Great Plan (11:25-32)

This paragraph wraps up what Paul has been saying about the future of Israel and the Gentiles. Paul has been discussing what the situation looked like at the time he was writing his letter, but now he shows what God’s ultimate plan is for Israel and the Gentiles.

Israel’s Future (26-27)

Paul looks around and comes to the unmistakable conclusion that Israel is being hardened in their rebellion against God. But Paul firmly believes this is not the end, that God does have a plan to bring all Israel around to accepting the gospel. God is working right now to bring in the Gentiles, but a time is coming when the Jews will once again be the focus of God’s saving work. This salvation of all Israel will happen when the Deliverer comes removing ungodliness from the nation, a reference to the salvation of Jews when Christ returns.

Why does it matter that God still intends to save the Jews?

The Gentiles Response (28-31)

God doesn't back out when He's made a commitment. God chose Israel to both receive special blessing and to be a channel of special blessing. Paul says God's gifts and calling are "without repentance," that is, He won't change His mind. While the Jews have at times opposed the work of Christ, they should not be thought of as enemies because God made special promises to them that have never been revoked. This means that Gentiles should be careful how they think about the Jewish people, because the Gentiles are no better than the Jews. The Gentiles had been shown mercy because of their belief, and the Jews were hardened because of their unbelief.

How should this impact the way we think about the Jewish people?

God's Purpose (32)

God's purpose behind this plan – to work through Israel, then the Gentiles, then Israel again – was very intentional. Through this plan God has shown that all are disobedient, and therefore all need mercy. No one will be able to boast, not Gentiles and not Israel. Both will recognize that what they have received from God is mercy, not a reward they worked for and earned. In the end, everyone will worship God for what He has done, rather than being arrogantly proud that they somehow deserve their salvation. In the end, pride will dissolve and all that will be left is worship.

God's Great Glory (11:33-36)

Paul's letters often break down into doctrine and application. For example, both Ephesians and Colossians begin with a lot of doctrine about Jesus and who we are in Him, and then proceed to give a lot of very specific commands and prohibitions. Romans also breaks down into doctrine (Romans 1-11) and practical teaching (Romans 12-16). As Paul ends the doctrinal section of Romans, he can't help but burst out into praise to God for all that He has done.

How does meditating on the gospel inspire worship?

Why is it that people who have known the gospel all their lives can be unmoved by hearing what God has done for them?

God's Great Gospel (Review)¹

When Paul wrote Romans, he intended for it to be read in one sitting (although he probably also expected it would be read and reread carefully). Breaking the book down into smaller pieces for more careful study has its advantages, but it can prevent us from seeing how all the pieces fit together. In this final section, we will take a step back and try to review all that Paul has said so far. Essentially we are asking the question "How does Paul present the gospel in Romans?"

Who needs the gospel? Everyone (1:18-3:20)

¹ While you will not be able to read through all the passages we have gone over, you might want to pick certain highlights from each section as you work through them. A suggested list might look something like Romans 1:16-17, 21-25; 2:1-5; 3:9-10, 21-26; 5:1-5; 6:1-4; 7:14-25; 8:1-2, 5-6, 18, 22-23, 31-32, 38-39; 9:6-7, 30-32, 10:1, 9-10, 13; 11:1, 21-23.

Paul begins with the great need that people have for the gospel. The pagans need the gospel because they have sinned willfully by rejecting God's law (1:18-32). Their rejection of God's self-revelation in nature has led to them twisting inward so that they become more and more foolish and base. But while the religious Jews might look down their nose at the pagans, they are in trouble too (2:1-5). It's not enough to simply have God's laws, if you do not keep them they do you no good (2:6-29). Yet sadly, neither the Jews nor the Gentiles have been able to keep God's laws (3:10-19). The result of this is that everyone needs the gospel because everyone is in sin, and the purpose of the law is to point this out to us (Romans 3:20).

Why do pagans reject the truth of God in creation? What does this say about us?

What would you say to someone who thinks they are good enough to earn their salvation?

How do we get the gospel? By faith in Christ (3:21-4:25)

So if no one can keep God's laws, then how can anyone be right with God? The answer is that we can be right with God only through the work of Jesus Christ. God the Father set Jesus Christ forward as a propitiation, an appeasement of divine wrath, through Christ's death on the cross. Yet it is only through putting our faith in Him that the benefits of what Christ has done can be applied to the individual (3:21-26). Salvation must be accepted as a gift; no works can be done to earn it. This puts both Jews and Gentiles on the same level because all must come to God through faith (3:27-31). This is nothing new, however, as from the very beginning Abraham has demonstrated that God declares righteous on the basis of faith (4:1-25).

What about God's character do these truths highlight?

Why do people consistently try to earn God's approval through the good works they do?

What results from the gospel? Our spiritual blessings (5:1-8:39)

Chapters 5-8 of Romans show us all the rich blessings that become ours once we are united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

What blessings can you remember being discussed in these chapters?

Chapter five starts off by discussing our peace with God, the hope we can have in trials, and the reconciliation that has happened between us and God (5:1-11). Paul then goes on to discuss how all those blessings come our way, through being in Christ rather than in Adam (5:12-21). Paul then discusses the believers relationship with sin (6:1-23), the law (7:1-25), and how the Spirit allows us to fulfill the righteousness the law always intended and to have power over sin (8:1-16). Not only that, though, the Spirit also gives us the strength and hope we need when we face trials, because we know He is interceding for us and that there is a glorious future coming (8:17-30). The hope we can have in forgiven sins and a confident future allow us to be confident in the love that God has for us, because if God didn't spare His own Son, what in the world would He hold back from us? (8:31-39)

Why is it that our hearts are often quick to doubt God's love because of our sin or our suffering?

How should we practically respond when we feel doubt about God's love?

Where is everything headed? The salvation of Israel and the nations (9:1-11:36)

But how should we think about God's promises when looking at Israel? After all, it would seem that some of God's promises have failed (9:1-6)? If God made promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and even the nation

of Israel as a whole, and right now the nation of Israel has rejected God's Messiah, what hope is there that we can trust in the promises being made to us? Paul gives five reasons why Israel's current rejection doesn't negate the truthfulness of God's promises: (1) physically being a member of Israel has never guaranteed that you were part of God's people (9:7-13); (2) God has the right to choose whom He will show mercy to and whom He will harden (9:14-29); (3) Israel went about being righteous the wrong way, even though God gave them the message (9:30-10:21); (4) God is still working with a remnant (11:1-10); and (5) God has a future plan for Israel (11:11-32). Through all this God has a design to bring both the nations and Israel to Himself in such a way that Gentiles can't boast since God's blessing came through Israel; *and* Israel cannot boast since they rejected God's blessings but were brought back by the faithful testimony of the Gentiles. In the end, the only one left with room for glory is God, who will be worshipped and praised for His wisdom and goodness (11:33-36).

Why do you think we don't focus more on the big picture of God's purposes for Israel and the Gentiles?

How could understanding God's plan for both Israel and the Gentiles help us better worship God?

In what ways has studying Romans so far this year been a help to you spiritually?

What about the gospel has become clearer to you as you study through the book of Romans?