

**Romans:  
God's Purpose to Display His Mercy  
Against the Backdrop of Evil**

**Romans 9:24-29**

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

*September 16, 2001*

If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans 9. We come this morning with burdened hearts to the house of the Lord. It's not that there is just a national crisis; our own congregation has been touched in many ways. We have sons and daughter, and sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law, friends and colleagues who have been touched in different ways, the Wares, the Yandells, the Welborns, many others in the congregation with friends who have been in harm's way. We have some friends who have stories of being remarkably spared from being at the wrong place at the wrong time, and so our hearts are acutely burdened, but there is no better place to be in that situation than right here, with these people praising Him, in the house of the Lord.

And before we turn to Romans 9 and pick up in verse 22, I want to reflect with you just for a few moments and say four things about our study of the book of Romans and this national calamity. The first thing is this; our study in Romans 8 and 9 has been uniquely, peculiarly amazingly timely because of its emphasis on God's sovereignty. How many times in the last few days and hours have you heard someone attempt to get God off the hook? "He didn't know this was coming. He didn't want this to happen. This wasn't part of His will." We've had many very sincere people that have tried to cope with the magnitude of this calamity by just moving God off the stage, and I can't imagine a place that would be more unsafe for us than a world in which God was not only on the stage, but controlling the play. It's one of the great comforts of our hearts that He is on His throne, and He is in charge even though we are not. And even though we don't understand what's going on, isn't it a mercy that God has been teaching us that about Himself in these last months. It's as if He has been pre-preparing us for the living of this day and hour. That's the first thing I want to say.

The second thing is that Romans 8 and 9 have over and over stressed the grace of God, and isn't that a word we need in this hour. We look to September the eleventh and we look to New York City and it is hard to see any grace in that great manifestation. We wonder how God's grace will be displayed, but one of the great lessons we have been learning in Roman 8 and 9 is that God's

sovereignty is unto the display of His grace, and He is always about the purpose of displaying His grace. And so even though we may not know now how the purposes of His grace will be served by Tuesday, September eleventh in New York, in Washington, and in Pittsburgh, we can be assured that the sovereignty of His grace will triumph and His grace will be displayed. Isn't it a mercy that He's been rubbing our noses in His grace for weeks in these great chapters that we might be prepared for this hour.

There is a third thing that I'd like to say to you as well. Our study of Romans 8 and 9 has confirmed to us, if we have been listening, the relevance of Scripture. You know, so often we wonder, "Is the Bible really applicable? Is it really practical? Does it really speak to my needs?" Well, tell me something more practical than the sovereignty of God's grace in the face of this. Name me something more practical than the reality that God is on His throne and it is His good and perfect, and merciful will that will be accomplished even through the wrath of men. Tell me something more practical than that. You see, we've learned in working through this great book, that God's word matters, and it relates, and it's relevant, and it's practical and it's suitable for the building up of men and women in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And there is one last thing that I want you to remember as we approach this passage today and it's this; the crisis about which Paul is speaking in Romans 9 is not a lesser crisis than the crisis we are facing this week. The crisis about which Paul is speaking in Romans 9 is not a lesser crisis than the one we are facing this week. It is numerically a greater crisis and it is spiritually a greater crisis. I don't want to underestimate at all the intensity of what we have gone through. The magnitude is absolutely mind boggling, and we're going to talk about that later in the sermon today, but I want you to realize Paul is talking about a catastrophe of exponentially greater proportions in Romans 9.

You see, we often come to the Bible and we ask, "Can the Bible really speak to where I am? Can it really get down to the things that I'm going through? Can the Bible live up to the intensity of the trials that I'm going through?" And I'm going to tell you right now, that's not the problem. You see, the question is, "Can you live up to the intensity of the trial that the Bible is speaking of here?" Because as intense as what we have gone through in this week, Paul is talking about a large-scale rejection of the one true Messiah by his own people that entailed thousands upon tens of thousands in his own day and has numbered now millions over the course of twenty centuries. My friends, what we are trying to pull our heads together and our hearts together about this week pales in comparison with the crisis and catastrophe that Paul is speaking about. I say that simply to say this: the question is never "Can the Scripture live up to our experience?" It is always "Will our experience live up to Scripture?" Now let's hear God's word in Romans chapter 9 beginning in verse 22.

"What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His

power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles. As He says also in Hosea, " I will call those who were not My people, 'My people,' and Her who was not beloved, 'beloved' " And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living GOD." And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; for the Lord will execute His word upon the earth, thoroughly AND quickly." And just as Isaiah foretold, "EXCEPT THE LORD OF SABAOOTH HAD LEFT TO US A POSTERITY, WE WOULD HAVE BECOME AS SODOM AND WOULD HAVE RESEMBLED GOMORRAH."

Amen. Thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired words. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God from Your word, cause us to behold wonderful truth. Help us as we pray to believe, to trust, to see You as You are, to acknowledge the goodness of Your purposes and to embrace Jesus Christ in faith. We ask it in His name. Amen.

### **I. God's purpose in election is to make His glory known.**

What does this passage have to say to us today? Four things, the first thing you'll see in verses 22 through 24, that long unfinished sentence. There Paul is telling us that God's purpose in election is to make known His glory to the recipients of His mercy. In other words, Paul is teaching us there, and this is the first thing we need to learn today, that God has a purpose to reveal the glory of His mercy against a backdrop of evil. Paul is providing for us, not only an inner philosophy of God' choosing, of God's gracious election, but he's also providing for us a philosophy of providence that God has the purpose to reveal the glory of His mercy even against the backdrop of evil. Walk through Paul's argument. You wonder, how in the world can Paul say that God has a purpose to reveal His mercy in all these people rejecting Him? How can God's purposes be served with people rejecting Jesus the Messiah, the Son of His love, the one who is the Savior of the world? How can God's mercy be displayed in that? Paul says, actually three ways, let me tell you. Look at verse 22.

Although, Paul says, although God had every right to immediately judge the wicked, He didn't. You see, this is a sign of His mercy. They rejected the Messiah, and yet He didn't immediately rain down judgment on them. It's a sign of His mercy, and what's more, go on and look at the end of verse 22. Instead, He patiently endured the sin of the reprobate. What is this but an example of His

graciousness, and we can see this going all the way back to Genesis. Adam and Eve are not immediately exterminated; a covenant of grace is established for them. Abraham is told that his descendants are going to be in captivity in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years, why? Because the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete. The Canaanites are godless pagans and God could have, with all due rights, sent the children to Israel into the Land of Canaan and wiped them all out and it would have been just. But He endured their sin for four hundred and thirty years that they might have the chance to turn to the one true God.

Think of the Lord Jesus dealings with Judas. John, in chapter 1, tells us that He knew every man's heart. He knew the heart of Judas who He chose his to be His disciple. He ministered along side of him for three years. He knew that he was His betrayer and yet He knelt to wash his feet that He might open the gate of repentance to him. God is forbearing with sinners, and this is a display of His grace and mercy.

Paul goes on to say in verse 23 that He did this in order to show His mercy to His chosen ones. That God's purposes in forbearing with sinners is not only to display His mercy in His patience, but to display His mercy to those who embrace Him so we we'll see both what we deserve, and what God has, in His mind-boggling grace, given to us instead. Something that we could never deserve; the mercy of God, friendship with Him, citizenship in His kingdom, sons and daughters of the most high king. All of these things He has given, and against the backdrop of sin, and rebellion, and rejection, and hardness of heart, those who embrace and have been embraced by the mercy of God see more clearly than they ever could have before, their own sin, and the greatness of God's grace.

Paul is telling us that God's purpose in providence and election is to display the glory of His mercy. And my friends, God always has a purpose to show the glory of His mercy, even in the events of last Tuesday. I don't know what they are. I may have an inkling of some of them. I may die not knowing all the purposes of God's mercy, but I do know this, that God always has a plan to reveal the glory of His mercy to those who are the objects of His mercy. And that's what Paul is telling you in this great passage. And then he's going to give you three examples of just how he does this.

## **II. Examples of God's mercy.**

First, let's look at verses 25 and 26. Here Paul says, God reveals His purpose to show the glory of His mercy against the backdrop of evil in the calling of the Gentiles. God reveals His mercy in the calling of the Gentiles. Example A, exhibit A of God's mercy and forbearance according to Paul, is the Gentiles themselves. He quotes from Hosea, and he applies this passage from Hosea to God's calling of the Gentiles. They were not God's people and yet, in His mercy, He's going to make them His people. He's doing this through Paul's ministry. It's Old

Testament proof that God has chosen the Gentiles, and Paul is appealing to it to illustrate the mercy of God. You see, these Gentiles had not received the covenant promises. God had not come to the father of the Gentiles like he had come to the father of Israel and given this glorious covenant of grace, and yet God in His mercy has now included these Gentiles in those Abrahamic promises. But the Gentiles were debauched, they were idolaters, they were enemies of God's people, they deserved judgment, and there, in God choosing then to be His children, He displays His mercy. Against the backdrop of evil He displays His mercy by calling these Gentiles out of the world and into His kingdom, and into His family, so that they worship Him, and love Him, and serve Him, and become brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ. They deserved immediate judgment, but God restrained Himself in mercy, and He chose them in mercy. The salvation of every sinner is a display of God's mercy in mitigating the judgment that we deserve, and showing us a favor that we don't deserve.

Do you remember throughout this passage Paul has taught us two things which are prime truths. Judgment is always just. Whenever we see God judge, it's always just. And mercy, God's mercy on us is always more than just, more than fair. It's mercy, it's not deserved, it's not merited, it's not earned. It's always a gratuitous display of His mind boggling love, and Paul has said that to us over and over, "When ever you see God judge don't say, 'Well, how can He be so mean?' It's just. Whenever you see God show mercy, think, 'There is no earthly reason for that, but the love of God, the grace of God, the mercy of God.'"

And my friends, I want to say to you that God's mercy was even revealed Tuesday in many ways. We saw a reminder on Tuesday of the restraining of God's immediate judgment. You know, that was a horrendous occurrence on Tuesday, we've never seen the like of that, and yet in seeing the catastrophe that occurred on Tuesday in New York, and Washington, and just out of Pittsburgh, we only saw a glimpse of what we deserve. We always think that we deserve better, but that's what we deserve, we deserve the judgment of God. And we were reminded that God has spared us, that in His infinite mercy He has not given us what we deserve, He's given what we could never deserve in His son Jesus Christ.

Then in verses 27 and 28 Paul gives example B, here is his second incident, his second indication of God's mercy. He says here that through God's election a portion of Israel has come to be saved. Paul is teaching us here that God reveals His mercy by saving a remnant of Israel. Paul himself is exhibit A. Here he is, I'm a Jew of Jews, I'm a Benjaminite, and I'm saved. I love Jesus the Messiah, and there are hundreds and hundreds like me. We worship the one true God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Though none of Israel deserved God's mercy and all of Israel deserved His judgment, yet God chose a remnant for Himself.

You see the root of salvation is always in the grace of God. The root of salvation is always found in the gracious choosing of God. The root of condemnation is in

ourselves. We don't usually look at it that way. We tend to think that God has an obligation to save, and that if He doesn't save everybody, it's not fair. That's not how the Bible looks at it. The Bible says, God's obligation is to justice. The surprising thing, the thing that catches your breath is that God Himself provides a way that His justice is assuaged and His mercy is visited upon a multitude that no man can number.

From the Bible's standpoint, that's not God's obligation. That's the most surprising thing in the world, because God's gracious choosing is the root of our salvation, but our sin is the root of our condemnation. And my friends, we saw God's mercy revealed on Tuesday, there were thousands who were spared on Tuesday. I don't want to make light of what went on. Let's pull back and think for a minute my friends, twice as many people left this world on Tuesday than died at Pearl Harbor. We have not seen bloodshed on U.S. soil in this quantity and dimension in the mist of war for one hundred and forty years. You must go back to the days of Antietam to see so many Americans fall on American soil, and yet, and yet, my friends, 45,000 people occupied those towers. I don't know how only 5,000 could have been lost. I just don't know, I have no idea. I don't think anybody in Manhattan has any idea. God, in His mercy, spared what could have temporarily been an even greater calamity.

But you know, God's mercy will also be shown in the events of Tuesday by the drawing of many to a Savior that before Tuesday they had no time for. Right in the center of the hustle and bustle of American life where we are all about the business of building up the strongest, the mightiest economic super power in the history of the cosmos, right in the middle of our pursuing the world to the 'nth' degree, God brings a stop to it, and suddenly men realize there is something bigger than the dollar and there is something bigger than the market, and there is something bigger than today; there is eternity. And many will be drawn into an eternal relationship with Jesus Christ through the harsh realizations, the costly realizations of Tuesday, September 11.

And my friends, don't our hearts go out right now to Tim Keller and to his flock at Redeemer as they minister in the midst of Manhattan. Don't you want to help them in any way possible to minister mercy to their neighbors, to their friends, to their effected congregation and to the unbelievers which are in teaming multitudes around them. Oh my friends, we ought not simply in word, but in deed supporting their work. We'll be telling you how you can do that in the days to come, but you be thinking how God can help those people minister the grace of the gospel in this time.

### **III. Without God's grace, death is the result.**

But there's one last thing I want you to see, you'll see in verse 29. Without God's electing intervention, the natural result is always death in judgment. If God

doesn't intervene with grace, the natural result is always death in judgment. Look at these strong words, "just as Isaiah foretold, unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, we would have become like Sodom and would have resembled Gomorrah." You understand what Paul is saying, and this is the most uncomfortable truth. Paul is saying that God's mercy is the one thing that stands between us and judgment, it's the one thing that stands between us and decadence, it's the one thing that stands between us and depravity. Paul is reminding us here, that even the remnant could not take credit for persevering itself. That credit belongs wholly with God. If He doesn't intervene, only death in judgment awaits.

Do you realize how shocking what Paul is saying is? He's looking out and he has a believing company in his midst. He's got Gentiles believers, and he's Jewish believers, and he's looking at those Jewish believers and he's saying this, "Look, even the remnant of Israel would be like Sodom and Gomorrah were it not for the grace of God. There is nothing in us, there is nothing in us that made us to be the remnant. It's only the grace of God." I don't know about you, but that's a little offensive to me. I don't like to have somebody say, "You know Ligon, I'm going to pull back the curtain of your heart and we're going to show exhibit A what your heart looks like." And here Paul pulls back the curtain of my heart and he says, "Ah ha, Ligon, you look like Sodom and Gomorrah." That's what Paul's saying here. Paul is saying, apart from the grace of God, here's what the remnant looks like; Sodom and Gomorrah. The only thing that stands between us and decadence in judgment is the grace of God, because my friend, the human heart is capable of untold evil apart from the grace of God.

And didn't we see that revealed on Tuesday? We saw, my friends, what we could become apart from the grace of God. We saw just a millisecond of a sliver, of a glimpse of what hell looks like, just a tiny glimpse into what happens when the restraining common grace of God is let go for an instant, this is where man can go.

And here is the Apostle Paul saying, if you want fellowship with the living God, than the only place you can go is to the grace of God, and the only way you can go to the grace of God is to go to Jesus Christ and to trust that He is who He said He is, and to rest in Him alone for your salvation as He is offered in the gospel. And then you will find that He has displayed in you the object of His mercy, the glory of His mercy. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, help us to see our sin and to see our Savior. In Jesus name. Amen.

*©2013 First Presbyterian Church.*

*This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No*

*attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.*

*Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the [First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement](#).*

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

#### **Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).