

## **Kawangware Conference April 2010 – The Purpose Of The Gospel (Romans 9:1-23)**

What is the purpose of the gospel? God was trying to save us, yes – but why? Not because we are so great that God was forced to do it! We must go deeper. What is the ultimate, the final purpose of the gospel?

Romans 9 can help us, because Romans is a letter all about the gospel. Paul's introduction in chapter 1 shows us this. When we get to chapter 9, the question is: has God's purpose failed? The question is asked, because according to the gospel, most Jews are not saved. How can the Jews be lost, when God chose Abraham? Has God's purpose failed? Paul says no: saving all the Jews was never God's purpose. He chose Isaac, but rejected Ishmael. He rejected the elder twin Esau, but chose younger Jacob. He did this because he has the power to do it: he is sovereign, and chooses and rejects whom he pleases. Everything depends at last on God: not man.

We are all sinners. God owes mercy to nobody. God is not unfair to anyone if he leaves them in their sin and lost-ness. So why does God save some and not others? What is his purpose? This is what we are beginning to learn as we go on into Romans 9:17-23.

God's purpose in all things is ultimately his own glory. The children's catechism asks “Why did God make all things?” and the answer is “For his own glory.” Adult catechisms ask, “What is the chief purpose of man?” and the answer is, “To glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” In 1 Corinthians 10:31 we see that even in eating and drinking we are taught to glorify God. If we are to seek God's glory in these small, ordinary things – how much more in the greater things? Romans 11:33-36 tells us that all things come from God and that all things are for God – i.e. for his pleasure, for his glory. We never do even a small thing like building a hut without a purpose. Surely God did not make a world, or send his Son to die, without a great purpose! What purpose could be greater than his own glory? What is more important in the universe than God's glory? The first line of the “Lord's Prayer” is, “Hallowed be your name”. In other words, the very first thing to pray for is for God's glory: we pray for our daily bread, and for forgiveness – but these come later.

In Romans 9:19 someone tries to question God. They say, “Is not God unfair? How can he blame us if we are lost, since is in sovereign control?” Paul does not answer with clever philosophy, or talk about free-will, but rebukes us for daring to challenge God. The gospel is designed to show that God really is God; he is the potter, we are the clay. He has the right to make us what he pleases – our duty is to submit to him, not to question his rights.

When we reach verse 22, Paul explains just how God glorifies himself through the gospel. Why do the wicked live? Why does God show such patience in allowing their evil lives and their resistance against him to continue? The answer is that he is waiting to show his glorious power and awesome wrath in their destruction. Paul gives us the example of Pharaoh (v17-18). Why did God send so many plagues on Egypt? Why not just rescue Israel straight away, instead of the long delay? The answer is that God had raised up Pharaoh, so that by judging him God would make his own name great throughout the world. People everywhere have heard of the plagues and the Exodus! We do not know what this Pharaoh's name was; but we know what God did to him.

When we are in heaven, we will hate sin as God hates it. Today, we wrongly think it is a very small thing. Then, we will see it as awful, horrible rebellion against the glorious King. Proverbs 11:10 and Revelation 14:9-10 show us that the judgment of wickedness brings praise to God. When God pours out his powerful anger on the wicked, it will lead to him being praised.

In 9:23 Paul tells us that God's purpose is to make known his glory to those who are saved. We who are saved will receive amazing mercy. This mercy will be seen all the more clearly, when we see God's powerful judgment of those who are lost. Just as a light is seen to shine more brightly in darkness, so seeing what God's justice demands against sinners will make his mercy and grace towards us seem even more wonderful. Ephesians 3:16-19 explains that the “riches of his glory” (Romans 9:23) are known to us when he powerfully works in us to show us the love of Christ and fill us with all of his fullness. Christ has paid the full price for our wickedness on the cross, and now we can share in Christ's inheritance as God's obedient Son.

When our final salvation arrives, we will stop looking at ourselves and at mankind, but look in amazement at God. If we have understood the purpose of the gospel, we have to be full of humble and sincere praise and worship to God. Our ministries and lives have to become God-centred, not man-centred. The gospel's purpose is to reveal just how magnificent and great God is. Is that greatness the heart of our ministries? Is it the engine driving our Christian service forward? If not, we have gone wrong at a most basic point. God designed the gospel to declare his own brilliance. If we preach the gospel for a different purpose, our first step is to repent, and go back to the beginning. We need to test our Christian lives and our ministries. God's purpose is to reveal his glory, both in salvation and in judgment. He does not intend to share that glory with anyone. What is our purpose?