

## Romans 9:1-5 – God's generosity was experienced by the Jews first

*Paul laments those receiving the original promises– but who did not receive Jesus*

**1 I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit –**

"My conscience" – not always a reliable guide unless aligned to the leading of the Spirit.

**2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.**

"I have great sorrow" – because Paul observes that most were unable to believe the Good News about Jesus, and respond to Him to be saved.

**3-4 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of**

**the law, the temple worship and the promises.**

"I could wish... myself... cursed" – not an offer that could be accepted – only Christ can stand in for another's sin. Following the golden calf rebellion, Moses made a similar plea, Exodus 32:32.

"Theirs is adoption" – in their rescue from Egypt, and the glory of God in the tabernacle, the law which prescribed their life and worship and saving promises through the covenants.

**5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, for ever praised! Amen.**

"The patriarchs" – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were of the Jewish people. Paul's most painful reflection was that the Messiah they rejected was from their own people, fully human – but also fully God.

**SUMMARY** Paul, classically educated in Judaism, expresses his devastation that the Good News of Jesus, the final instalment in a long list of covenant promises and privileges, should be dismissed by most of those at the front of the queue! Jesus had taught that He was sent, first, to the lost sheep of Israel, Matthew 15:24, and in His humanity He shared the same ancestry and revered the same patriarchs. Yet His own people proved the most resistant and threatening, and here Paul reflects – with both sadness and love – that his experience was the same.

**REFLECTION** Those who believe they have it all, are often the most reluctant to receive more. And to be offered something more can be perceived, wrongly, as taking away from what has been offered before, even if it complements what has been given. Another aspect of Paul's pain here is the reality that often those closest to us, are the hardest to witness to. But he was prepared to go to any length to see them receive Jesus and salvation.

**QUESTION** *When disappointments and discouragements come, how should we handle them before God?*

**PRAYER** Father, You so loved the world that You gave... and we experience Your grace and generosity in so many ways.

You invite us to draw near for refreshing, You make provision for us to meet our needs and You are generous in forgiveness when we turn to You.

May we always be open to what You want to do next in our lives. Forgive us our tendency to pride and self-sufficiency, when we are nothing and we have nothing and we can do nothing of enduring value – apart from You.

Thank You so much for sending Jesus, our Saviour, in whose name we pray. Amen.

# The Living Word

Bible readings for Sunday, August 2, 2020, with explanatory notes

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Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for **August 2**  
*Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching*

Theme: **God's abundant generosity**

Psalms 145:8-9, 14-21 – God is compassionate to all

Isaiah 55:1-5 – God's generosity in forgiveness and salvation

Matthew 14:13-21 – Abundance in the mountainside feeding miracle

Romans 9:1-5 – God's generosity was experienced by the Jews first

## Psalms 145:8-9, 14-21 – God is compassionate to all

*The Lord's love is seen in His generosity of spirit, and watchful provision*

**8 The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.**

"Gracious and compassionate" – almost a quotation of Exodus 34:6 in which God reveals Himself to Moses. This is the opposite of the popular view of God as stern and fickle, long on demands and short on tolerance.

**9 The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made.**

"Good to all" – God's common grace is benevolent to all people, with one proviso: it does not save the rebellious from judgment, v.20 below. For that, He has special grace to reach out to those who turn and believe, John 1:12; Romans 3:22.

**14 The Lord upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.**

"Lifts up all who are bowed down" – in the context, those burdened by oppression or difficulty. God's kingdom works the opposite way to the world's 'success' culture. Also, in vv.18-20 "upholds... lifts up" can apply to believers bowed down in the submission of worship.

**15 The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food at the proper time.**

"You give them their food" – in Jesus' model prayer, "Give us today our daily bread",

Matthew 6:11, connects with this promise.

**16 You open Your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.**

**17 The Lord is righteous in all His ways and faithful in all He does.**

**18 The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth.**

"The Lord is near" – those who trust Him know that God is near, approachable, and ready to help like a friend.

• **For further study**, see Psalm 138:6; Isaiah 55:6; John 14:14.

**19 He fulfils the desires of those who fear Him; He hears their cry and saves them.**

**20 The Lord watches over all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy.**

"Watches over... will destroy" – the verbs sound similar in Hebrew and the form is like a mirror. The point of the psalm is that true faith will see and enjoy God's goodness.

**21 My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord. Let every creature praise His holy name for ever and ever.**

"Praise His holy name" – the Lord's name stands for the revealing of His presence, His power and impeccable character.

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## Isaiah 55:1-5 – God's generosity in forgiveness and salvation

*What cannot be earned or paid for is given, out of an eternal promise*

**1 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.**

"Come" – God speaks to the exiles in a tone which is urgent but reflecting opportunity, not a problem. It looks back to the Servant's redeeming work and kingdom which is for all who will come, Isaiah 53:6.

"Come to the waters" – for spiritual refreshment, similarly wisdom's invitation in Proverbs and Christ's invitation to drink the water of life.

• **For further study**, read Psalm 42:1-12; Proverbs 9:5; John 4:14, 7:37.

"Buy wine and milk... without cost" – all who are spiritually hungry and thirsty find salvation here "without cost". Salvation cannot be earned or bought.

**2 "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to Me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.**

"What is not bread" – the un-nourishing husks of pagan religious practice, the "bread of deceit" rather than the bread of life, Proverbs 20:17, John 6:32-35. God's gracious gift of salvation through the death of His Servant is beyond price. People cannot earn it, only act on it, Ephesians 2:8-9.

**3 "Give ear and come to Me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, My faithful love promised to David.**

**SUMMARY** The encouragement to come to God to have your spiritual thirst satisfied was first spoken prophetically to the discouraged exiles. However, it runs through the Bible. When God gave water to the Israelites walking through the desert to Mount Sinai, Exodus 17:1-6, it was drinking water, but in their predicament, it also saved them. This invitation to "come to the waters... without cost" extends grace to the original exiles, alienated by their own breaking of the covenant with God – and it extends grace to everyone of every age, alienated from God by sin.

**REFLECTION** The invitation also speaks to anyone who is distant from God. God's offer is gracious – no one deserves it. Nothing we can do contributes towards it. God's purpose is saving people, through His Son Jesus, the "witness to the people" and their just ruler, and our response is simply to "Come to Me; listen, that you may live".

**QUESTION** *Why is it difficult for us to receive an offer which is made without cost or condition?*

"An everlasting covenant... promised to David" – the promise of an unending dynasty, one that would be fulfilled in the Messiah. Acts 13:34 quotes from this verse: Christ's resurrection was further evidence of this promise to David.

• **For further study**, read 2 Samuel 7:14-16; Isaiah 9:7, 54:10, 61:8.

**4 "See, I have made Him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples.**

"A witness to the peoples" – a reference first to David, who exalted the Lord among the nations, and to David's Son, the Messiah who is a light to the nations.

• **For further study**, see Psalm 18:43, 49-50; Isaiah 42:6, 49:6.

**5 "Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for He has endowed you with splendour."**

"Nations you do not know" – this follows the OT theme of nations being attracted to the God of Israel, Isaiah 2:2-4, 45:14; Zechariah 8:22. Through David's descendant (and through the church) would come an endless witness to the world that Yahweh, our God, is the only Saviour.

## Matthew 14:13-21 – Feeding the crowd with more than enough

*Jesus reveals Himself in a scene that is a reminder of manna in the wilderness*

**13 When Jesus heard what had happened, He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.**

"When Jesus heard" – about Herod's hostility, Matthew 14:1-2, He distanced Himself from the threat; His time had not yet come.

**14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed those who were ill.**

**15 As evening approached, the disciples came to Him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."**

"This a remote place" – or "desolate", ESV, a scene that recalled the tribes in the wilderness, and how God met their need then with manna. "Go to the villages" – even many small villages would have nowhere enough bread for such a huge crowd.

**16 Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."**

"You give them..." – getting the disciples to recognise the impossibility, so that they will see the miracle for what it is. Later, it is the disciples who are hands-on and giving out the multiplying food, v.19.

**17 "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.**

**SUMMARY** The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle of Jesus recounted in all four gospels. Shortly afterwards, Jesus underlines its significance by revealing Himself as the true manna or "the bread of life", John 6:32-35. To people steeped in their history of finding the Promised Land and relying on God's provision of manna in the desert, this was a powerful and meaningful way of Jesus helping them to work out who He was.

**REFLECTION** Involving the disciples in the miracle was also a lesson to them on many levels. Although none of the gospel accounts gives detail of exactly how the miracle unfolded, three of them show the disciples having a significant part in the multiplication. It was a partnership requiring them to be involved, and to exercise their faith.

**QUESTION** *Why did Jesus involve the twelve disciples in giving out the food and collecting the scraps?*

"Five loaves" – small, hard barley rolls, a boy's portion.

**18 "Bring them here to Me," He said.**

**19 And He told the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.**

"He gave thanks and broke the loaves" – as any Jewish head of the household would do.

"The disciples gave them to the people" – also stated by Mark and Luke.

• **For further study**, see Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13.

**20 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.**

"Twelve basketfuls... left over" – a reminder of Elisha's miracle where barley loaves were multiplied, 2 Kings 4:42-44. Also a reminder of Jesus' earlier teaching on God's abundance, Matthew 6:11, 25-33.

**21 The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.**

"The number of those who ate" – amounting to more like 10-15,000 counting the women and children together with the 5,000 men.