

Romans 15:5-14 - God's Salvation is for all peoples

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[0 : 00] Our reading today is from Romans 15, verses 5-3, on page 1141 of the Church Bibles.!

So that with one mind and one voice, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed, and moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

As it is written, Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles. I will sing the praises of your name. Again it says, Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people.

And again, Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles. Let all the peoples extol him. And again Isaiah says, The root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations.

[1 : 24] In him the Gentiles will hope. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Great, let's pray. As we come to God's word, let's pray. Father, we do thank you so much for your love and kindness to us. And thank you that whoever we are and wherever we are from, we find that in your word, by your spirit, you speak to us.

And so we pray that might be our experience this morning. How we ask, Lord, that you might cut through the noise and the distractions in our hearts, and that you might speak to us clearly.

That you might encourage us and challenge us and rebuke us. Whether you might bring us life and hope in the Lord Jesus. As we pray in his name. Amen. I think it's probably quite easy towards the end of a letter like Romans to imagine maybe that we've covered all the important stuff.

So we've done things like sin and judgment and justification and sanctification and all those kind of things. And you might think, well, okay, surely now we're like just finishing off the last little bits.

[2 : 44] Perhaps this is like school, you know, in June. What are you actually doing in school in June? You know, you're just watching DVDs by now. All the main stuff has been covered. And, you know, the teacher's just thinking about their holidays.

And you're just kind of winding up. Well, listen, it's not like that in Romans, okay? In Romans, it keeps going right to the very end. And I think what we've got in these last few chapters are some really, really important implications, especially for us in the place that we find ourselves as a church this morning.

Paul is going to tell us here that because Christ is for all people, so therefore our church should be for all people. You could put it another way, that the way Christ saves should shape the way that church behaves.

Paul's sentence in verse 7 is this, that Christ accepts the nations, and so the church should accept the nations as well.

Now, I know this week that welcoming or accepting the nations has come under great scrutiny.

[3 : 55] We've had riots, haven't we, in Northern Ireland this week on this issue. But Paul is not making a political statement here about how open or closed the borders of a nation should be.

That's really outside the scope of what Romans 15 is about. His concern is not so much for a nation. His concern really is for the church. And his point is that the church should have open borders to the nations, for the very reason that Christ has open borders to the nations.

So that for us this morning, regardless of who we are or where we're from, we're all welcome in the church of Jesus Christ. Now, what I want to do with our time is to spend it in this passage and to split it into essentially three slightly unequal parts.

The first part is just to think some more about what it means for Christ to accept all kinds of people and how that works out in church life, and then to think of some of the implications of that, both for

the glory of the Lord Jesus and for our good and our joy.

So let's start with Christ for all people means church for all people. Christ for all people means church for all people. Really, this is the center of the passage.

[5 : 06] So let's have a look at verse 7. Let me read it to you again. Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed, and moreover that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.

Now, the language here, you might notice, is very similar to last week's passage. Last week's passage, we were told to accept one another weak and strong because God accepts us weak and strong.

But here the scope is wider, right? The scope here is to our national identities, specifically here, the nation of the Jews, literally the circumcision in the passage, and the Gentiles, literally the nations, taethne, the uncircumcised.

And notice how Paul explains this. Keep your eyes on the passage. Christ's acceptance of the Jews, how was that? What was that like? Well, it was by becoming a servant of them on behalf of God's truth to keep the promises made to the patriarchs.

In other words, Christ accepts or welcomes the Jews by serving them according to God's ancient plan and promise. A promise that was made generations before.

[6 : 29] So Paul is not here so much interested in the nation of Israel as we might think of it today. He's rather thinking about the Old Testament Israel, the people of the Old Testament promises, the circumcision. And his point is that Jesus came to serve those who had faith in the Old Testament promises, by fulfilling Old Testament promises.

So that the Jewish believer is to look at Christ and go, he's exactly what I was waiting for. He is the one I was looking for. He is the fulfillment of all that was promised to us.

In other words, Jesus has not come to bring some sort of distinct salvation for the Jews and then a different distinct salvation for the Gentiles. No, he's brought the salvation that was promised to Abraham, Moses and David.

First for the Jews and then for the Gentiles, as Paul put it in chapter one. Perhaps you're one of those people who, when you're waiting for a train or maybe you're flying somewhere, that you perpetually check that you're on the right platform or at the right gate.

You like that? You're kind of worried, am I really in the right place? Am I going to get on the wrong train and end up in the wrong place? Is this my stop?

[7 : 43] Is this my gate? And in a sense, that's Paul's kind of sense here for the Jewish nation, for the circumcision. He's saying, listen, on platform, Jesus, you're in the right place.

This is going to the destination that you were promised. He is the one that you've been waiting for. You don't need to wait for anybody else. Climb aboard Jesus. You'll end up exactly where Abraham said you would.

But, and this is the key to all this, it's not the destination of just the circumcision or the Jewish destination. The destination is not the nation of Israel because verse nine, look down at it, these Old Testament promises given to Abraham were not just so that the circumcision might glorify God for his mercy, but so that the nations might also glorify God for his mercy.

Now, to you and I, that might not sound that radical, right? We're perhaps used to hearing it. Okay. What I think you're saying, Steve, really basically is that Jesus came to save Jews and Gentiles. Are you going to tell me something I don't know yet?

Right? You might think that's just fairly common knowledge. But in Paul's day, this needed saying over and over again, there were people contradicting this all the time. There are still people who contradict it.

[8 : 54] But the truth is, God does not have one plan for the Jews and another plan for everyone else. No, there's one plan, there's one saviour, there's one promise, there's one destination all the way through the Bible.

And that destination is all nations praising God through Jesus Christ. Now, that is so important to Paul that he underlines it with four Old Testament passages. So, he quotes David in Psalm 18, I will praise you among the nations.

He quotes Moses from Deuteronomy, rejoice you Gentiles with his people. He quotes the psalmist in Psalm 117, praise the Lord all you Gentiles.

Finally, he quotes Isaiah in verse 12, the root of Jesse will spring up, the one who will arise to rule over the nations. In him, the nations, the Gentiles will hope.

Now, all that emphasis is really, really important. because it means, doesn't it, that I can look each of you in the eye this morning and say to you, without any kind of qualification, without having to kind of make any sort of nuance or sort of make an exception in any way, I can say to you, listen, this morning, Jesus is your saviour.

[10:08] He came for you. Wherever you're from, however you got here, whatever your religious or national background, whether you've been to Jerusalem or whether you grew up in Watford, Jesus is the saviour for you.

In fact, there is no other saviour other than Jesus Christ. And what you need to know is that Jesus has no national preferences. Yes, he came in fulfilment to the ancient promises of the Jewish nation, but he came to them for the nations that we might all praise him.

So again, let me try and say it to you as clearly as I can, whoever you are this morning, whether you feel like you belong here or not, what you must know is that Jesus Christ this morning is calling out to you.

And he says, come, follow me. I came for you. Your problem, he says, the problem common to all humanity, my problem, is not a political problem, it's not a financial problem, it's not even a geographical problem that I might be in the wrong place.

My problem instead is a moral and a spiritual problem that you and I, regardless of who we are, stand before the holy God who made us in exactly the same way. Sin and condemned for us because we've not lived for him or worshipped him.

[11:26] And Jesus says, listen, I am the only one who can deal with that problem. I am the only one who can deal with that problem. And I came not just for the Jews, not just for the Brits or the Jamaicans or the West Africans or the Brazilians.

I came for anyone. And he does that by taking on our guilt, satisfying justice in his death on the cross, making us new by the Spirit and bringing life and reconciliation with the God who made all of us.

And Jesus says this morning, whoever you are, wherever you're from, come to me. Come and hear this ancient word of grace. You know, I previewed that with Adam just in a few words.

I told him that one would come who would crush the serpent's head. That was me. It was promised to Abraham who was given circumcision as a sign. It was then explained to Moses in more detail as he was given the law and the temple.

We shadowed it in David who was the king and the champion. But now, says Jesus, I have come. I fulfilled all of that. I am the new Adam. I am the circumciser of hearts.

[12:32] I am the new temple, the new place that you come to meet with God, the place the old temple was pointing to. I am the final king, the champion. So all that searching that you've been doing ends with Jesus Christ.

Christ is for all peoples. That means, next step, so church should be for all people. Because we're told, aren't we here, that we are to accept one another in exactly the same way as Christ accepts us.

Now notice it really carefully. Verse 7 does not say, make sure the church is for all kinds of people as if the diversity of nations in the church is something that we are doing.

Essentially, the instruction is not that. Essentially, the instruction is, don't stop this. Don't resist this. Don't stand in the way of what Christ is doing. Don't let your sinful tendency to be unfriendly and unwelcoming, to be ungenerous to those unlike you.

Don't let that stop the church from being what Christ has always made it to be. Instead, take that acceptance that you have from Christ, that acceptance that took you from wherever and whenever you were and brought you into God's family by his grace and his mercy and turn that around and use that for others, accepting them in fellowship in just the same way.

[13:53] Maybe I can say to you this morning if you're not a Christian and someone's brought you to church this morning and you wonder, why is it that the friendship that they extend to you seems so much richer and deeper and better and more loyal than anything else you've experienced?

Let me say that is because what you are experiencing is the welcome of the Lord Jesus Christ through there. That's what he's saying here. So we become conduits for Christ's love of the nations, which the end of verse 7 brings praise to God because really it's his welcome on display.

Now before we think about the implications of this let's just think about the power of what Paul is saying here for a moment. Notice that Paul is assuming that it is possible for a local church, for the church in Rome that he was writing to or our church now today, it is possible for us to contradict the work of Jesus Christ.

I mean there are a number of ways of us doing that, right? We could contradict the work of Jesus Christ by saying something like Jesus wasn't really divine. That would contradict the gospel, wouldn't it?

Or we could say Jesus didn't rise from the dead. That would also contradict the gospel. If you go to churches and they say those things they're not telling you the truth. Jesus is divine, he did rise from the dead. But what Paul is writing to church in Rome and saying to us this morning is he's saying no, there's another way of contradicting the gospel of Jesus Christ and that is by being unwelcoming to people who are not like you.

[15 : 24] You can tell a church that loves Jesus where Jesus is at work, where Christ is present by his spirit, not so much because the music sounds a certain way, you know, oh yeah, those are the chords that Jesus plays. It's not that, is it?

Not because they dress a certain way, that's not proof. Not because they all look the same or look like they're from the same place. No, rather you can tell that Christ is present in a church because the person next to you who looks nothing like you, who sounds nothing like you, who looks like they're from a completely different background to you, turns to you and says, hello, welcome. It's really lovely to see you this morning. So pleased you're here. And it's as we extend that welcome towards one another that we pass on the acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It means, doesn't it, if you're in a place where people just hang around with people who are exactly the same as them, where people only really talk to people who are the same age or the same background, you're not really in a church.

And the message here isn't, you know, oh, what you really need to do is try harder and dig deeper. I mean, it does involve our effort, but really this is the power of the Lord. This is his acceptance working into our acceptance. And so we're not to resist it.

[16 : 36] Don't resist the spirit. Don't resist what he's doing. You know, contrast that with what's been happening in our nation this week. Or you could put it like this, the mood of our nation at the moment.

You know, the riots and the trouble this week are basically because people are worried, aren't we, that we can't afford to welcome people. You know, if we open our borders, it means less to go around. And like I'm saying, Paul is not commenting on that directly.

He really is not interested in the nations of this world. He's interested in the kingdom of God, the church. And he's very clear, isn't he? We can open the borders of church just like Jesus Christ has because the resources for welcome are unlimited.

That's why. God is not limited in his resources to welcome people. He has endless resources of forgiveness and mercy for all who would come. And so we best make sure whatever we do that we don't with our attitudes or our words to others close them down and block the pipeway.

So if you're a Christian this morning, this is your home and you're welcome here. If you've come through the door of Jesus Christ, he stands wide open to all people of all backgrounds saying welcome home. Welcome.

[17 : 44] Now the implications of this are around verses 7 to 12. You may have noticed if you're very, very observant as the Bible was read by Natasha earlier that verses 5 and 6 and verse 13 are very similar.

They kind of like sandwich our passage between them. So verse 5 and verse 13 start in the same way. May the God. And then they both have a so that following them.

And really if you like these are sort of like prayerful blessings from Paul to the people. He's saying this I am praying this to God I'm asking God for this but I also want everyone to hear so that you know what I'm asking for.

So let's deal with each of them in turn. The first one is to do with God's glory. God's glory. Look at verse 5 let me read it to you again. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the first give in that sentence in verse 5 is not actually there in the Greek. It's literally may the God of endurance and encouragement. Just like verse 13 is the God of hope and we'll look at that

in a moment.

[18 : 59] So here it is God who possesses the endurance and the encouragement and yes he gives it to us in passing it on to his people the attitude of Christ so that through the endurance and encouragement of God we might think of one another in the same way as Christ thinks of others.

Now that's exactly what we've been seeing isn't it? Christ accepts us so we've been given this mind towards others so we also accept one another on the same terms. His acceptance flows through us and we do that don't we?

So that verse 6 in a wonderful unity of mind and voice we might glorify God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ one voice proclaiming his glory.

Perhaps we could put it this way gospel culture if you like gospel culture is both massively broad and also incredibly narrow at the same time.

Right so gospel culture the culture of the kingdom of God is so broad you cannot possibly express the culture of the kingdom of God with just one national culture.

[20 : 07] You have to in order to represent gospel culture it has to be all nations. We saw that didn't we and we're going to see it again in Revelation 7 in a few moments. So yes the sinful parts of those national cultures they will be outside of gospel culture.

It is it's broad but it's not so broad to scoop up the sinful parts of different people's cultures. cultures but it's bigger than any one subculture. But it's also really narrow because gospel culture is centered unified one voice on Jesus Christ is united in him.

Not in such a way that obliterates national identities making one national identity and language but by holding the breadth of everybody together in one voice in Jesus Christ.

And that's Revelation 7 isn't it that we were looking at with the children. After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation tribe people and language standing before the throne and the Lamb wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands and they cried out in a loud voice salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

Now notice you can still see in Revelation 7 the different national and cultural differences. It's not one language or one identity rather God is glorified by the unity of the diversity who are worshipping him.

[21 : 36] It's as they come with all their different languages a great multitude that no one can number but they are singing praises to Jesus. When I was a child my parents used to take me to a Christian conference in Wales in Aberystwyth.

It was amazing I went every year I think between the age of zero and the age of 18. It used to meet in packed out old churches and they would sing old hymns and I listened to some really amazing preachers down the years and that was mostly because I was banned from the children's ministry which is a totally different story and you can ask me that later if you'd like to.

But from time to time one of these great Welsh preachers would say something like this they'd say do you know what this hymn is so much better in Welsh. In heaven we'll all be singing in Welsh.

And I'd sit there as a kid going I can't even read the road signs in Wales. Am I not going to be allowed to sing in heaven? And the truth is isn't it Revelation 7 that says really Welsh is the language of heaven but so is English so is Lingala so is French so is Patois so is German so is Spanish they're all the languages of heaven and we will sing together not in confusion but in unity of the glory of Jesus salvation belongs to him he saved me what's that?

And so here's the thing for us as a church God is glorified by us not by us enforcing a single strong culture expecting everyone to look the same and sound the same and dress the same we glorify God not by aiming for young adults or for families or for people like this or people like that we glorify God by the differences between us united in Jesus Christ and so the message really is come as you are come as you are you know if you've got a great Scottish accent like Louise praise God in that language in that accent we'd love to hear it if you want to if you want to come in a suit and a tie you come in a suit and tie that's great you're very welcome if you want to come to church in a track suit like a road man you come to church in a track suit you're very welcome we'd love to have you if you want to wear your national dress wear it you're welcome if you want to clap you clap not now but if you want to clap you can clap if you feel a bit uncomfortable clapping because you've got the same issue that I've got which is a lack of rhythm altogether and it just makes it sound terrible then that's fine you just stand there with your hands in your pockets because we don't want to rob God of the glory that belongs to him and the glory that belongs to him is that we're all different but we're

saved in the same way through Jesus Christ now that doesn't mean that church is chaos and it doesn't mean either that church is a platform for showing off who you are rather church is a platform for Jesus Christ to show off how great he is and so we focus on him the second implication here in verse 13 is slightly different we've gone from

[24 : 55] God's glory now to look at our good and let's think about our joyful hope our joyful hope let me read verse 13 to you again may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit notice here again God is the possessor of hope he is the God of hope in fact as you look back at verse 12 you can see that in a sense God is our hope our hope is to be with God in him the Gentiles the nations will hope our hope then is to be with God and notice that this God of hope fills us with joy and peace as we hope in him so that we are overflowing with hope or really overflowing with him as he fills us with the spirits it's amazing really isn't it Paul wants us to remember that as hard as we're working now as much as we want our church life to be brilliant as much as we want to welcome and accept one another whoever we are wherever we're from still the gospel is not just about now it's about the future gospel is about hope the church is about something bigger and better and more glorious than just local church our hope is not to be here but is to be with God with him eternally in him we want to be in the Revelation 7 crowd don't we that we've been thinking about praising him and being with him and notice that it's that future hope it's the hope of being there that brings us in the present joy and peace because for all the wonders of local church right now and for all of the great things that we enjoy in

Christian fellowship with one another it is still not quite home and even if we do a really brilliant job we will always sense deep in our hearts somewhere this is this is just not quite the right place not quite home yet Andrew Barnett and I went to some lectures this week at my old seminary in North London and we sat in the very same lecture theatre that I'd sat in nearly 25 years ago to listen to my lectures and as we were walking out Andrew said to me this must feel really good for you it must feel like you're coming back home in a way I explained no it didn't feel like that at all I remember being there as a student who couldn't afford the fees so basically I was allowed to sit in on the lectures as long as I didn't try and answer any of the questions and you know the lecturers were very kind to me and so were the other students but I never really felt like I should be there and it was funny just going back to it so many years later and still having that same feeling

I don't really really belong here I don't really fit in and we get that don't we in lots of different places maybe you've experienced it this week we're complicated people and any sense of feeling at home is really elusive this side of glory we are all of us aren't we deeply insecure and really what Paul is saying here is that actually that is not really an issue of geography there is no place that you could travel to that you would feel perfectly at home as a Christian and the problem isn't just imposter syndrome that you are sat in that lecture theatre full of all these really bright people and you know that you're not there on the same terms as them like I felt as if oh if only you had a bit more self-confidence Steve then you'd feel at home it's not that is it no those things are really just symptoms of a deeper problem you know if you feel a little bit sort of I'm not quite sure where I fit in at church actually there's a sense in which you couldn't really move to another local church and find it much better if you're sitting there think well if only there were more people my age I'd feel a bit more at home these are all symptoms aren't they the deeper problem is that all of us live our lives in this world away from God that despite his presence being with us by the spirit we are still yet to be fully with him as we will be in glory and while church is meant to be the best of it this side of glory the gospel says that home is not the local church but home is with the Lord that's our home because we're not getting there in our lives rather Christ is taking us home and that brings us peace in the present you know we said earlier didn't we about that feeling of anxiety of wondering am I really on the right platform is this really going to be my bus am

I going to end up in the right place is this the right plane am at the right gate and that Jesus is saying to the Jewish I am your savior I will take you to the right place well really what Paul is saying here is this and in Jesus Christ you know you're on the bus and he will take you home you will be there and however lumpy and bumpy the journey is you will be home so every cultural gaffe we make every accidental offense that we cause will be one more little reminder do you know what your net you're not yet home but you will be one day and there we'll receive this glorious welcome from the king who died for us who says I've been waiting for you welcome home welcome home let me pray as I close heavenly father we want to praise you and thank you that the lord Jesus Christ is a savior for all kinds of people that whoever we are this morning wherever we're from whatever our

backgrounds however good or bad or otherwise we feel like we've been Jesus is just the savior that we need and thank you that he is a savior who promises to bring us home to be with you eternally and Lord we want to ask that this side of being home that our local church would feel like a kind of a mini oasis along the way a resting place a place of peace and joy and welcome and acceptance and we thank you that because of where we live and the time that we live in there are so many different people in this room and we thank you and praise you for each one of them we thank you for all the different stories in the room of your goodness and your love and your kindness and your mercy and we pray that you would be honored and glorified as with all of our differences with united voice we praise Jesus and as we point to his glory and his majesty in his name we pray amen