

1Tim 24-04-21a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It's a privilege to be with you this morning. We're grateful for the good weather and the opportunity to resume our study in the mystery doctrines related to the gospel Paul preaches. We have looked at the three kinds of love associated with this, and these areas of love and the expression of love define us as disciples of the Lord Jesus. They guide us in our interactions with others, and they permeate all of these elements of the mystery gospel.

And we're going to pick up—we've already seen the first three of these—and we're going to begin looking at the fourth this morning, which is the mystery of the blindness of Israel. Interestingly enough, this is not just a theological point or a historical point, but it has direct application for us as we look around us, not just in dealing with people of the Jewish heritage or persuasion, but with many types of believers with whom we come in contact. So it's going to be helpful, I think, for all of us.

And we will be in the last several chapters of the book of Romans this morning, if you want to be turning there. But let's ask God's blessing on fellowship and study, and then we'll begin.

Father, how grateful we are for the believers that you have united us with in this church, in our fellowship, in our families, and in our associations. We're grateful for the opportunities to practice the things that we learn, to exercise our faith so that we can lay hold of righteousness and endeavor to reflect your glory so that we shine as a light, and the love that defines us and identifies us becomes a witness to the world that can draw others into relationship with yourself through the Lord Jesus. We pray that, as we look at the Scriptures together this morning, that the Holy Spirit will be our guide, our teacher. Impress these things in our hearts in a way that makes sense and enables us to walk worthy of our calling, to represent the Lord Jesus, and to be qualified for service and function now and in the ages to come. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

So turn with me, if you will, to the book of Romans. We're going to do something somewhat unusual. We often go verse by verse, and we try to make sure that we have gleaned the meaning from each one of them as we move forward. But this fourth mystery, which we anticipated last time, is the mystery of the blindness of Israel. The 11th chapter of the book of Romans is where this is identified as one of the mysteries that Paul reveals. This is Romans 11:25 and 26: "I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits. Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles become in. When that day comes, all Israel shall be saved."

So this relates primarily to the first-century transition time, where the people of God, identified for nearly 2,000 years as the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, redeemed from slavery at the first Passover, baptized in the Red Sea, wandering in the wilderness 40 years until that first generation expired except for Caleb and Joshua, and then entering the land of promise 14 centuries before the coming of Christ—to have a relationship with God in Old Testament days was to come to Israel. This is where God has his presence. This is where he has chosen his people. This is where he has revealed his will and the means by which one can live an acceptable life in covenant relationship to God.

There is now a change. There is a transition, and all of us are sort of change-averse. I certainly am. And at that time, the Holy Spirit descends, and God implements a new phase of his plan. This is now the age of the Holy Spirit, introduced by the appearance of the Holy Spirit in visible form, descending like tongues of fire on the assembled Jews in Jerusalem. So it begins with the original people of God, if you will. But the sign of each man hearing the preaching of Peter in his own language is new. This polyglot gospel presentation centering on the Lord Jesus Christ and his work of redemption and atonement and expression of the love of God in doing so is new.

You think back. This is nearly a reversal of what happened at the Tower of Babel, where one language became many. Now many languages are not a barrier to understanding. So this then results, after a short period of time, in the broadening of the target audience of the gospel through the Apostle Paul to the Gentiles. And Jesus, if you read carefully the quote-unquote Great Commission in Matthew 28, if you read Acts 1:8, these are foreshadowings. Jesus says, "Make disciples from all nations." But at the time that he said that, there is already a diaspora. There is already a scattering of Jews. And I am sure that the original 11 who hear Jesus say, "As you go, make disciples of all nations," they assume that they will be traveling to other places than historic Israel to find and make disciples of Jews. They're not yet aware that there is going to be a new people of God created by a different means. It's not going to be physical birth; it will be spiritual birth. And instead of a physical people with physical traditions, physical practices, physical feasts and sacrifices and shadows defined by the law, the

fullness is going to come in Christ. And oddly enough, the reality will be spiritual, and the physical becomes a portent, an anticipation, and the fullness is in Christ. And his kingdom is not of this world at this time. They were expecting a physical kingdom. What comes in is a new age with an entirely new set of foundational precepts.

So all of this results in a great conflict, because change-resistant Jews, even those who come to faith in Christ, can't shake their belief that pleasing God happens by keeping the law. So Paul addresses this in the book of Romans, and you can pick up in chapter 10. We'll leave the dissection of chapter 9 for other occasions, but in chapter 10, this is what Paul says. And you need to have this text in front of you. Pull it up on a phone screen, if you can still hear my voice. But we are going to read the next couple of chapters because we're going to start with this mystery. This is mystery number four, the mystery of the blindness of Israel.

Why does Paul bring this up? Obviously, it's an issue in the first century. The Jews who are coming to Christ need to understand that there is a new paradigm for serving God, and by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. This is going to be a difficulty. But you figure Paul revealed this mystery about 2,000 years ago, so why do we need to know it? It seems important to the Jews. You've got to get over this adherence to the old ways and understand that God is doing a new thing after Christ has come and accomplished his work and returned to glory. But I don't have any problem with that. I get that. I don't have to keep the law. So do I really need to go through this?

Watch what happens in these chapters in the latter half of Romans. Watch what happens with regard to love. Watch for this sphere of love that we've been studying these past many weeks, whether it is the one another's, whether it is the neighbors, or whether it is those who are outside. Paul is going to leverage and transition from talking about this blindness of Israel straight into everything we've been studying over the last couple of months.

Brethren, notice in chapter 10, verse 1: to whom does Paul speak? Is he preaching to a mixed crowd? Is he attempting to evangelize? Is he trying to bring the lost in like sheaves from the field? No. To whom is he speaking? The same people he addresses in Romans chapter 1: the saints, those who are faithful in Christ Jesus. So this is addressed to brethren. Are you a brother or sister? Am I a brother or sister? Yes. So this material is for us. And where is the destination? Rome. These are a mixed group. There are some Jews present, but this is largely a Gentile audience. Once again, that's us.

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved," is that they may be saved. And you remember from past experience that there's a place where Paul is going to say all Israel shall be saved. I just quoted it at the beginning. This is going to come in chapter 11. But his prayer and desire is that they may be saved, which implies and pretty much communicates the fact that all Israel is not currently saved. Paul's desire is that they be saved.

What kind of salvation is this? If there are the people of God, evidently some of them are saved and some of them are not, and Paul says, "I wish they all were saved," all delivered, all related to God in a fruitful way. "I bear them witness. They have a zeal for God." There is a God. I believe in him, and I'm interested. I'm active. Zeal is not acknowledgement. Zeal is pursuit. Zeal is often an aggressive attempt to gain blessing. Remember Jacob wrestling with the angel all night long. He wrestles with the man: "I will not let you go until you bless me." Does Jacob have a zeal? But he is attempting to gain blessing in a fruitless way. You don't get blessing by wrestling, unless you're a wrestler and God blesses you in your career. But spiritually speaking, they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

Little kids can have a zeal to get something done, but they don't know how to do it, and often mayhem, chaos, and destruction ensues. You can want to do a thing. Those of us that have ever bought something from IKEA, or one of these assemble-it-yourself things at Walmart, these little pieces of furniture with pegs and holes and special fasteners and a little tiny flat crescent wrench stamped out of cheap metal—if you just unpackage that thing and start trying to put it together yourself, it is always a disaster. It will fail. You will have the wrong part upside down. Things don't match. Tab A doesn't fit into slot B.

What do you need if you're going to assemble something yourself? You need knowledge. You've got to get the instructions out and do it step by step. I have sometimes thought I knew what was going on. Well, I built one of these a couple of years ago. How hard can it be? And I'll put something together and then discover that there's something that was supposed to be sandwiched in, and I've got to undo my work and put the little piece in and then put it all back together. Knowledge. You can have a zeal. You can have motivation. You can want to get a

thing accomplished, but it's not enough to be motivated. We have to be informed. It has to be a right thing done in a right way, in a right sequence, with the right procedure, with the right tools, and so on.

"I bear them"—who is them? "I bear them witness," Israel, the previous generation of believers in God, who have a zeal for God, but they're missing some knowledge, and their zeal is now misdirected. They, being ignorant of God's righteousness—what is it they don't know? How do you lay hold of God's righteousness? Do you and I know how to lay hold of God's righteousness? If I say, "How do we lay hold of righteousness?" what would you say? By faith.

It's here in Romans. "The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who are faithing," who are believing. Righteousness by faith. Well, okay, but what does that mean? That's like me saying, "If you insert Tab A into slot B, you will have righteousness." What? How does this righteousness-by-faith thing work? If we stop class right now, and I say, "Everybody scatter. Go out and get you some righteousness by faith, and let's come back and compare notes," what would that look like? How does that actually work?

You've got to refer to a diagram and say, "Oh, this little thing here, this is Tab A. Oh, I see, this part is the one that has slot B. And what angle do I assemble these at so that this will slip smoothly in and attach? And I've got a little keeper there that's going to hold it all in place." Just knowing that righteousness comes by faith is not enough. It's a truism. It's an aphorism. It's a saying, and we can say it any number of times. It's not the same as doing it. What is the practice?

They have a zeal for God, not according to knowledge, being ignorant of God's righteousness—how it works, how to actually obtain it and possess it and keep it unto the resurrection and the future kingdom. So, being ignorant of God's righteousness, what are they doing? They are seeking to establish their own. "I'm not going to read the instructions. I'll pick up these pieces and fit them together myself." Seeking to establish their own righteousness. This is back to the correctness detector, our feeling of being right.

"Well, I think if I do the following four things, if I refuse to ever commit adultery, if I never steal from anybody, if I do my best to never lie or bear false witness or tell an untruth, if I refuse to covet my neighbor's ox or his donkey or his manservant or his maidservant or his wife or any other thing that belongs to him, I'm gonna not covet. I'm gonna not steal. I'm gonna not prevaricate. I'm gonna not commit idolatry. I'll be righteous. That seems right to me. I see people doing those things, and they're very obviously wrong. I'll refrain from doing those, and I'll be righteous. And I've got Scripture to back it up. I've got logic to back it up. I've got observation to back it up. People that do those things perpetrate and spread evil. I'm not doing those things, so I'm righteous. I am intensely convinced. I am rock-solid in my conviction. This is the way to be righteous." And off I go, and I refrain from doing this list of things.

My dad used to say, "I don't smoke, and I don't chew, and I don't go with girls who do." So that makes me righteous. That's not what the Word of God says. That is, in fact, keeping the law. But by the works of the law no flesh is declared righteous. No human beings become righteous by keeping the law. What does keeping the law do? Avoid sin.

You think of a number line. You think of your bank balance. Have you got money, or do you owe money? Are you in the good, or you're in the hole? Keeping the law, at best, means you are not in debt. You don't owe a penalty. You are not guilty of wrongdoing. So you're at the zero point. But that doesn't accrue on the positive side righteousness. This is why Paul says in this same book, "By the law comes the knowledge of sin." The law defines what sin is. Don't do these things. If you do these things, you will not be sinful. If you neglect to observe the feasts, if you neglect to offer designated sacrifices, if you neglect to love your neighbor as yourself and love the Lord your God with all your heart, your life will be characterized by sin, by evil, by wrongdoing, by deficit.

The best you can do, if you could keep all the parts of the law, you're not sinful. But it doesn't make you righteous. And this was the big misunderstanding. It's the rich young ruler that comes to the Lord Jesus: "What must I do to be saved?" The rich young ruler says—Jesus says, "Well, you need to keep the law. You need to be basically sinless." He says, "Well, all these I've kept from my youth." And Jesus says, "Now go and sell what you have, give it to the poor, and come follow me." Where is any of that in the law?

You can keep the law perfectly, but you haven't laid hold of righteousness. Righteousness, as Jesus expresses it there, if he divests himself of his goods, takes the proceeds, and blesses other people with it—what is that? This is proactive love. Give it to the poor, and to come and follow the Lord Jesus. This is love for God and love for

one another's. It goes above and beyond the requirements of the law, and he can't do that. He has a lot of goods, and he doesn't want to part with them. His conscience is clear. "I've kept all of the parts of the law from my youth." A clear conscience and a spotless record of keeping the law is not enough. You need righteousness.

So, being ignorant, in verse 3 of chapter 10, being ignorant of God's righteousness, they just don't know that sinlessness is not righteousness. Seeking to establish their own righteousness: "I will decide what is good. I will stand on the street corner and make long prayers. I will drop bags of money into the treasury at the temple. I will do what I do to be seen by men, and if they consider me righteous, then I'm righteous. If I can show that I'm righteous, that'll be a good thing." Seeking to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to the righteousness of God. This is a choice. I can either figure out what God wants and do that, or I can decide what is proper and do that. My standard is always easier to meet than God's, I've come to find out. It's very convenient.

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who is believing, everyone who is believing. It's a present tense, everyone who believes. Notice it doesn't say who has believed, who believed in the past. Those who are walking in faith are the ongoing. This is like a durative present. It isn't some aorist tense in the past. If you ever believed in Jesus Christ, is the end of the law for you. No. If you are living in faith, by faith laying hold of righteousness through faith, Christ ends the law. Why?

Well, verse 5: Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does these things shall live by them." What does that mean? You don't bring yourself under capital punishment if you avoid those capital sins defined in the law. He's sort of using the extreme case here. "The man who does these things shall live by them." The righteousness of faith speaks in this way: "Don't say in your heart, 'Who can climb into heaven? I will ascend. I see Jacob's ladder. I'm gonna go climb that thing and get into heaven.' Or, 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" And he makes some points about Jesus here, but the point is, doing is in view. The one who does these things will live by them.

"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart." That is the word of faith which we preach: that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead—notice how many times do we see the resurrection intrinsic to the gospel? It is not enough to believe, according to Paul, that Jesus died for your sins. If you think Jesus died for your sins and he's still dead, you are of all men most miserable. You're still in your sins, Paul says.

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, this is overt acknowledgement. Why would you need to confess with your mouth? Why can't you just confess it in your heart? There has to be enough conviction. Who do we talk to with our mouth? Remember James? We were looking at that. You, with one breath, you bless God, and with the next, you curse those made in the likeness of God. We talk to God, and we talk to each other. We don't talk to angels. You don't talk to the dead. Well, some people do, but I'm not sure how far that conversation gets.

Confess with your mouth. What does that imply? I am praying to God, and I am communing with one another's, with fellow believers. I am speaking my faith. I talk about it because it defines me. It is a part of me. When I talk, my faith is evident, whether I'm talking to God or talking to one another, right? If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, this is your conversation. This is your life.

If the fact that you believe in the Lord Jesus and that you're endeavoring to live a life that represents him, that pleases the Father, that shines a light, that has a divine purpose and a divine enablement, that is a path illuminated by the Holy Spirit, that is heading for the narrow gate—it's going to come out in conversation. And there is a serious question, which I don't have to answer. God knows. But people who don't confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus, are they saved? I don't know, and I don't need to know. I don't have a need to know.

This is why classified information is classified. There are things that are important, critical, essential, part of the grand overall strategy and plan, but at my level, I don't need to know. If I ever need to know someone's salvation status, it will be because they are in my immediate circle, and God is going to implicate me in some way in influence or conversation. And if I need to know their salvation status, it will become evident through the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit. But to make blanket statements about who is and isn't saved, I don't need to know that. God's the one who needs to know, and he does know.

What I know is those who confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in their heart that he is the resurrected Lord and Savior, they're saved. I would not make some final pronouncement. I wouldn't bet my salvation on whether or not once saved, always saved is a truth. It's difficult to demonstrate from Scripture. I

can't tell you who's not saved, or who—you know, can somebody be the seed in the shallow soil and it springs up in a day, the sun hits it, it wilts, and there is no life left? It is totally and utterly dead. It is as though the seed was never there. Is that a picture of salvation? I don't think so, but I don't know for sure.

What I do know is what Scripture says. Those people who confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in their heart that God raised him from the dead, they are saved. Notice, they are confessing with their mouth. This is an ongoing reality in their life that comes out in their conversation. They pray to God, and they talk to fellow believers, and they talk to others who ask them a reason for the hope that is in them. When people are talking Jesus Christ as the real and risen Savior, those people are saved. I know that for a fact.

The status of people that are in the murky darkness which is outside, they don't talk about the Lord. They'll tell you that they don't even know if there's a God. Did something happen in their childhood, and they're saved? I don't know. God knows. I only know for sure those who are saved. I know each of you in our church, and every single one of you that I know, we are saved. We talk about the Lord Jesus. You are here to learn about him so that we can talk about him and celebrate him and pray in his name to our heavenly Father with the power of the Spirit, and we're endeavoring to live our lives to please the Father. If we didn't believe, if we didn't confess, we certainly wouldn't be here. There might be other churches where one could be comfortable without an active faith, but not here, because this is all we do. There's no other reason to be here.

So I know with certainty, and I would stake my salvation on your salvation. Now Paul is going to talk about what he would be willing to do with his own salvation for the sake of his fellow Israelites here. But Moses writes about righteousness which is of the law. This is a shadow righteousness. This is a works-based righteousness. The righteousness that comes from faith confesses, verse 10, "With the heart one believes with a view toward righteousness," unto righteousness. I believe, and the reason I believe is I am seeking the righteousness of God. I know that I don't have righteousness in and of myself. I was conceived in iniquity and born in sin, so to speak.

With the heart one believes with a view toward righteousness. I don't believe because I want to take it away from the lake of fire. I don't believe because I'm scared into it by somebody preaching thunder and damnation. I believe because I want to be pleasing in God's sight. I want to be related to him. I want to accept the offer of adoption as his son and his child and have a future with him. I want to live in that future kingdom of the Father where righteousness is at home. I believe because I am actively in need of righteousness, and I am seeking it, and I know that it is only to be found in Christ from the Father.

With the heart one believes with a view toward righteousness; with the mouth confession is made with a view toward salvation. I look at God because he is the Savior. I look at the Lord Jesus because he is the Savior. I look at the Holy Spirit because he is the one who reveals and enables and empowers me in relationship with the Father through the Son. I believe the Scriptures, and I confess with my mouth because I appreciate what God has done in uniting us as believers in a body of Christ, in a fellowship. And with a view toward that deliverance, our shared deliverance as well as our individual deliverance—deliverance in this present evil age, deliverance from deception, deliverance from temptation, deliverance from my own fallen nature, deliverance from the failures and grievances that come to us from others—I confess with a view toward deliverance, salvation.

The Scripture says, "Whoever believes on him will not be put to shame." Do you believe that? I believe it. I believe that shame and blame are in the past for those who walk in faith. Our sins are separated from us as far as the east is from the west. Our past, whatever failures, whatever completely stupid things I may have done in the past, by the grace of God through the blood of Christ, those are washed away. I am endeavoring to wash my robes, my clothing, and make them clean and white in the blood of the Lamb. I believe the promise of God that I am forgiven and cleansed from those things, and my sins are not as powerful as God's grace, God's forgiveness, and God's cleansing. There is grace greater than all our sin. That's a wonderful song: grace that is greater than all our sin, individual and combined. Whoever believes on him will not be put to shame.

There is no distinction between Jew and Greek. Isn't that kind of an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms? Paul says there is no distinction, and then he defines two different groups. What's the difference in a Jew and a Greek? Well, the cultural heritage, history, and yet he says there's no distinction. There's no distinction between these two distinct groups. So what is he talking about? This is why we need context. You can't say there's no distinction between these distinctions.

There is no distinction between Jew and Greek. The same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon him. When it comes to relationship with God, when it comes to the privilege of calling on God, and when it comes to the

richness of God expressed toward those who call on him, God doesn't care if you're a Jew or a Greek. God doesn't say, "Well, it's nice that you're calling on me, but you know, you're a Greek, and I only respond to Jews." There is no distinction in God's eyes. Context is critical. There is no distinction between these distinct groups. Man wants to distinguish Jew and Greek, but God is indifferent to the background or the heritage. The same Lord over all, the same Lord over all Jews and all Greeks who call on him, is rich to those all who call upon him.

What is the condition? Is the Lord rich to all men everywhere? He is rich to anyone who calls on him. "For," verse 13, "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Whoever calls will be delivered. This is confessing with the mouth, right? This is an ongoing present tense. I have called on the Lord in the past. I call on him in the present, and I will call on him in the future. I look to him for the richness of his grace and mercy. Anyone who is so doing is absolutely, unconditionally, without contradiction, without argument, saved.

If you are calling on the name of the Lord, if you are seeking his righteousness, if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and that is the basis and the foundation under your relationship with God, you are absolutely, without question, without a shadow of a doubt, saved. That is assurance. I can't talk about assurance for those who may have made a protestation or an acknowledgment or an affirmation of belief at some point in the past, and you wouldn't know it to look at them. You ask them, "Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Do you think he came and died on the cross and God raised him on the third day?" "I think, you know, that's Jewish. I, you know, I just don't see any evidence. It's not, it's unscientific. I don't see—I don't see this. I don't see that. You know, show me the proof." Well, that's in God's books. The name may or may not be in God's books. I don't know. I only know the affirmative, and I don't plan on being anywhere near that gray area where it's a question. It's questionable.

My concern for those who, from my point of view, my knowledge, my understanding, are in a questionable status, where I don't know where they stand with the Lord—what can I do for them? In many cases, they are our loved ones. They are blood relatives. They are close friends. They are people with whom we have human relationship that can go back years, decades. And like Paul, I have sorrow in my heart for these to whom I am related because they haven't figured out the righteousness of God. Paul is gonna say, "I would put my own blessings and rewards on the line. I would let God take them back for the sake of my brethren." We have a heart for them.

What is the best thing we can do? What can we do for them? Should we debate, argue, keep trying to pull them physically across the line? The best thing we can do is what Paul does: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God for salvation." I am going to confess it with my mouth. I am going to believe it in my heart. And I am going to live a light that is the lamp God can put on a lampstand and let that light—that lamp is not moving. It is the light that is shining. It is the light that has the energy and the power of God.

The best thing I can do is be a nice, clean lamp. The glass is clear. The maximum amount of light is shining from my lamp, and let the light do the work. Cultivate the light. Walk in the light as he is in the light. Have fellowship with God. Live a life that radiates the presence and the power of God, and you can win loved ones without a word. Wives married to an unbelieving husband can win their husband without a word. Paul says, how? It is the radiant light of the glory of the gospel of Christ, who is the image of God. It will shine to them, and if there is any seeking—note—if there is any receptivity whatsoever, they will come to the light.

I cannot push the light. I can't force the light. I can't get a funnel and a tube and send it past the restrictions in their throat. But I can shine the light as consistently, as brightly, as lovingly as possible, and let the light do the work. Let God work through his Spirit, and I will be the opposite of an obstacle and a stumbling block. My life can be an invitation. My life can be an example of what is desirable, what is joyful, what is revealing in the grace of God and the mercy that comes from the throne of grace.

That's what we can do. We'll pause and take a break. When we come back, we're gonna pick up in chapter 10, and we're gonna move a bit more rapidly. This is the foundation on which Paul is going to build his argument in these next few chapters, starting with the blindness of Israel and, interestingly, moving to this very theme: how do we express love? He seamlessly uses the blindness of Israel to talk about love. It's an amazing thing. We'll see it when we come back.