

Sunday 16th August 2026

Bible Readings

Romans 11:1-2 & 29-32 NRSV

[1] I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. [2] God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? [29] for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. [30] Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, [31] so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. [32] For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

Matthew 15:21-28 NRSV

[21] Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. [22] Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." [23] But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." [24] He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." [25] But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." [26] He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." [27] She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." [28] Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

Questions

1. What question does Paul ask at the beginning of Romans 11?
2. Why does Paul use himself as evidence that God has not rejected Israel?
3. What does Romans 11:29 mean when Paul says, "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable"?
4. What does Paul mean when he says that God has "imprisoned all in disobedience" (Romans 11:32)?
5. Who is the woman who approaches Jesus in Matthew 15?
6. Why does Jesus initially appear to refuse the woman's request?
7. What does the woman's response about the crumbs reveal about her faith?

8. Why does Jesus describe her faith as “great”?
9. What do these passages teach us about insiders and outsiders?
10. What is the main theological connection between Romans 11 and Matthew 15?

Extra:

- Q11. What does Romans 11 teach about God’s continuing covenant relationship with Israel?
- Q12. How does the Canaanite woman challenge our understanding of election and the universality of salvation?
- Q13. What does Romans 11:32 teach about the relationship between sin, grace and universal human dependence upon God’s mercy?

Reflection

A Mercy Wider Than We Expect

Romans 11:1–2, 29–32 and Matthew 15:21–28

These two passages invite us to think deeply about God’s faithfulness, our persistence in faith, and the wideness of God’s mercy. They also challenge us to consider whether we sometimes place boundaries around God’s love that God himself does not place there. In Romans 11, Paul is wrestling with the difficult question of Israel. If many of his fellow Jews have not accepted Jesus as Messiah, does this mean that God has abandoned the people with whom he made his covenant? Paul’s answer is emphatic: **“By no means!”**

He goes on to make an important statement about God’s character: **“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”**

God is faithful. Human beings may struggle, doubt, wander or fail, but God’s faithfulness does not disappear. This is an important source of hope for us. Our relationship with God rests ultimately upon God’s grace and faithfulness, rather than upon our ability to get everything right. Paul then takes us even further. He says that all have experienced disobedience so that God may be merciful to all. None of us can stand before God claiming that we have earned his love. We all depend upon mercy.

Matthew gives us a remarkable example of someone who trusts that mercy. The Canaanite woman is an outsider. She does not belong to Israel, yet she comes to Jesus because her daughter desperately needs healing. At first, she seems to encounter silence and rejection. Nevertheless, she refuses to give up. She kneels before Jesus and says: **“Lord, help me.”**

Her persistence is striking. Even when Jesus speaks about the children’s bread and the dogs, she responds that even the dogs receive the crumbs falling from the table. She

believes that God's mercy is so abundant that even the crumbs are enough. Jesus responds: **"Woman, great is your faith!"**

Her daughter is healed. There is something here for our own journey of faith. Sometimes prayer seems to be answered quickly. At other times we pray repeatedly, and nothing appears to change. The Canaanite woman encourages us to continue bringing our needs before Christ. Persistent prayer is not about forcing God to do what we want. It is about continuing to trust him, even when we do not understand what is happening.

But this story presents another challenge. The woman is someone whom others might easily have regarded as an outsider. Yet she becomes an example of great faith.

How often do we make assumptions about people? We may decide who is interested in God, who belongs in church, or who is likely to have faith. Jesus repeatedly challenges such boundaries. Romans reminds us why. **We are all recipients of mercy.**

If our place in God's family depends upon grace rather than our own achievement, then we cannot treat God's mercy as though it belongs to us alone. The Church should therefore be a place where people encounter that same generous welcome—a community where the stranger can become a friend, the outsider can discover belonging, and those searching for God can find people willing to walk alongside them.

These readings leave us with a powerful message:

- God remains faithful.
- God's grace cannot be earned.
- God's mercy reaches further than we expect.

Having received that mercy ourselves, we are called to become people through whom others can experience it.

Questions for Personal Reflection

1. Where in my life do I need to keep trusting God's faithfulness, even when my prayers seem unanswered, or the way ahead is uncertain?
2. Are there people whom I consciously or unconsciously regard as "outsiders"? How might the faith of the Canaanite woman challenge my assumptions?
3. If I truly believe that I live by God's mercy rather than my own achievements, how should that change the way I welcome, forgive and show compassion to others?