

Romans 11:13-15, 28-32

Have you ever noticed that people always seem to **want** the things they can't **have**? Some of you have probably seen that thought in **action** when you hid the Christmas presents for your family in a closet, and told the kids, "Now, you kids stay **out** of there." All of a sudden, **that closet** is the **only** place they want to be. And, I'm sure that many of you are **also** familiar with the phrase, "Keeping up with the Joneses." It works like this. When Mrs. Jones goes out and buys some new **patio** furniture, Mrs. **Smith** decides that **she** needs some too. Or when Mr. Jones drives his new **Lexus** into the driveway, Mr. **Smith** decides that his old **Ford** just isn't good enough anymore, and he goes out and buys one too.

Have **you** ever done that? Have you ever felt **jealous** of someone else? Have you ever **wanted** something that already belonged to another person? Have you been guilty of "Keeping up with the Joneses?" Normally we don't think of **envy** or **jealousy** as being things which are **good**. In fact, God gave us two commandments - the 9th and 10th - which deal **specifically** with the subject of **covetousness**, and the **attitudes** of our hearts. However, in our text for today, God actually **uses** envy or covetousness to accomplish a **positive** and **godly** goal. By leaving the rebellious **Jews** on their **own**, and sending the Apostle Paul out as the great missionary to the **Gentiles**, God intended to make the **Jews** - His **chosen** earthly nation - **jealous**. Now, while such an action certainly sounds **strange**, it is not at all **unusual** - at least, not for our **God**. As we already heard back in the 8th chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, God can and does use **all** things - even things which **seem** to be sinful or evil - to work for the **benefit** of those who **belong** to Him.

Today in our text, the Apostle Paul shows us that **God's Mercy Knows No Bounds**. He **graciously** reaches out to those who are **undeserving** - Jews and Gentiles - young and old; and when there is **opposition** to His grace, He **creatively** overcomes even the most **severe** obstacles. Let's start by looking at God's **chosen** people - the Israelites. Our text begins, "*I am talking to you **Gentiles**. Inasmuch as I am the **apostle** to the **Gentiles**, I make **much** of my ministry, in the hope that I may somehow arouse my **own** people to **envy**, and save **some** of them.*" Paul begins here by talking to the **Gentiles**, but he is talking to them **about** the **Jews**. So, we're going to focus our attention **first** on God's Old Testament people. The LORD had **promised** and had **delivered** tremendous **blessings** to the people of Israel. Theirs were the **promises** of the coming **Messiah**, theirs was the **temple worship**, theirs was the **law** of **God** given on

tablets of stone at Mt. Sinai. They had all the **advantages** which should have made following the Savior **easy**. But it **wasn't** easy, and instead of **following** the Savior, we hear that they **rejected** Him.

Paul talks about this **rejection** throughout this section of his letter to the Romans. As he concludes chapter 10 Paul writes, “*Concerning Israel He says, ‘All day long I have held out My hands to a **disobedient and obstinate** people.’*” God’s chosen people had turned **away** from Him, therefore, God sent the Apostle Paul to the **Gentiles**. In other words, Israel’s **rejection** of the Gospel opened the door for the **rest** of the world to hear about God’s great **mercy**. Paul tells us the **reason** for this action. He writes, “*I am the apostle to the Gentiles, that I may somehow arouse my **own** people to **envy**, and save **some** of them.*”

I think the concept of **envy** is pretty clear in a **boyfriend-girlfriend** relationship. When that relationship begins to grow **cold**, because something just isn’t **right** anymore, often a **breakup** occurs. And after that boyfriend has been **dumped**, you’re **happy** again. That is, until your **best friend** starts to date him. And then you begin to wonder whether you might have been too **rash** in your judgment. You think that maybe you made a big **mistake** in breaking up, and now you’d like to have him **back** again.

That’s what God was expecting to happen when He opened up His word to the **Gentiles** through the message and ministry of the Apostle Paul. The promised **Messiah** had been the boyfriend of **Israel**. But when **Jesus** came, He didn’t match Israel’s preconceived idea of what the Messiah was supposed to **be**. They were looking for an **earthly** deliverer, and Jesus made it very clear that He had come to deliver them from the power of **sin, death**, and the **devil** - **not** from the power of the **Romans**. So, Israel **broke up** with the Savior. That made it possible for Paul, as an ambassador for **Christ**, to take the message of **forgiveness** and **salvation** to the wide-open mission field of the **Gentiles**. Paul’s **hope**, and God’s **design**, was not only that the **Gentiles** would believe and be saved, but also that some of the **Jews** would want the Savior back again **too**. In this way God would fulfill what Paul had told the **Corinthians**, that “*God was reconciling the **world** to Himself through Christ.*”

Paul goes on to say, “*I **make much** of my ministry.*” In other words, when he was talking with his fellow **Jews**, Paul always made it a **big deal** to **emphasize** his work among the **Gentiles**, and to talk about the spiritual and eternal **blessings**

which they were receiving through **Christ**. So, imagine **yourself** as one of those Jews who had **given up** on God's Son. Wouldn't you be thinking, "Why should I sit back and let the **Gentiles** have all those blessings? Why should I continue to be so **stubborn** and **obstinate** when God has said that I can **share** in all these blessings if I will only put my trust in His **Son**?"

Now, I think it's significant that Paul recognized that this **reverse psychology** which God was using would **not** work with **all** of the Jews. Paul has no **delusions** about a universal conversion of his Jewish brothers. Rather, he is satisfied to give his **all** - to be **all** things to **all** men - in order that he might save **some**. We here at First German **also** need to recognize, that not **all** the people who hear the Good News of salvation proclaimed from this pulpit will be **saved**. Yet, **some** of them **will** be saved, and that makes it **worth** all the time, energy, and resources which we as a **congregation** and as **individuals**, pour into the Gospel ministry.

That is **not** to say that there won't be some **obstacles** to overcome. As you well know, we always seem to have **financial** problems here at First German. Hearing about those **problems** over and over again can leave us feeling quite **overwhelmed**. But we should **also** be overwhelmed by all the **blessings** which the Lord has showered on us here - including the extremely **gifted** and **dedicated** group of **called workers**, the **hard-working** and **faithful** laypeople, as well as the church and school **buildings**. I am **personally** overwhelmed by the **privilege** of being able to serve the Lord among you. It is very obvious that we have a tremendous **diversity** in the areas of ministry which we are privileged to carry out in this congregation. Some of our efforts and resources are directed toward strengthening those who are already **members** of First German, while others are directed toward the **unchurched**. Some of our efforts are directed toward the **elderly**, **others** toward the **young**. We work with people who have a **German** heritage, and with those with a **Hmong** heritage. **All** of these efforts are **expensive** - in terms of time, talent, and treasure - and that can be a big **obstacle** to overcome. But all of these efforts are so **important**, that like the Apostle Paul, we will do **whatever it takes** to bring the Gospel to **all** men, so that by all means we may save **some**.

And, we will **do** that, knowing that in spite of all the **investments** we have made in the congregation, we still don't **deserve** any of these **blessings** - physical or spiritual. **Mercy** is the **only** avenue of **hope** for people who have **no merit**. And

because we are all **disobedient**, we have **no merit**. So these blessings are ours - just like they were for the **Jews** and the **Gentiles** in Paul's day - only because **God's Mercy Knows No Bounds**, and God's mercy **in Christ** is **in charge**.

And finally, we must be careful not to make the mistake which the **Jews** made. In the days of the **patriarchs**, they **had** wonderful blessings from the Lord, but they also **lost** them when they turned **away** from Him. And yet, we are told that **God** had not turned away from **them**. Our text concludes, "*Just as you (the Gentiles) who were at one time **disobedient** to God have now received mercy as a result of **their** (the Jews) **disobedience**, so they too have now become **disobedient** in order that they too may now **receive mercy** as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to **disobedience** so that He may have **mercy** on them **all**.*"

What that **says**, is that if God **wants** something, He **will** get it - one way or another. God wants **all** of His people, and He can and does use some very **creative** methods to accomplish His purposes. In **this** case He used **disobedience**. God wanted the disobedient **Jews** to be His people, so He **called** them out of all the other nations, and made them His **own**. But God also wanted the disobedient **Gentiles** to be His people. So, He allowed the Jews to **fall away**, in order to have an opportunity to **bring in** those Gentiles. And because His calling of the Jews has never become **invalid**, God now sends **us** out to **bring** God's **mercy** to them once **again**, and to regain a **remnant** for Him. After all, those who have **received** God's mercy must also **share** God's mercy.

We **do** that by telling others about the **most** creative way in which God overcame the **greatest** of **all** obstacles - an obstacle which is found in **all** people. It's the obstacle of **sin**, and God **overcame** it with the innocent **death** of His Son, **Jesus**, on a **cross**. Who would have ever thought that such a **horrible** act could bring about such a **wonderful** result. Certainly, no mere **human** mind could **ever** have come up with such a plan. But, **God's Mercy Knows No Bounds**, and because of His grace and mercy the perfect life and the innocent death of **Jesus** have been credited to **our** account. Therefore, because of **Jesus**, all of the elect, Jews and Gentiles, young and old, will receive "*life from the dead*," and the greatest **riches** of all - a perfect, eternal home in **heaven**. Thank God every day for **His Mercy Which Knows No Bounds**. Amen.