

What are we doing with God's riches?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev A.G.Ross

[0 : 00] Romans 2 and verse 4, where the apostle says, Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.

Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance. Romans 4 and verse 2.

The first three chapters of this great epistle can be likened to a courtroom scene. God himself is the judge. All mankind are the defendants.

And that able and distinguished law scholar who sat at the feet of Gamaliel, Paul, is the prosecuting counsel. The indictment is that all men are guilty before God of breaking the law of God, and the death sentence is demanded.

That's the seed in the first three chapters. In chapter 1, it is the Gentiles who are thus charged with a solemn variety of sins as listed there in chapter 1, charged with perversity, irreligion, pride, idolatry, and perhaps worst of all, the gross moral perversion of which they were guilty.

[1 : 33] And in chapters 2 and 3, it is the Jews who are charged in this court scene, charged with self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and with being proud religionists, of the kind we were thinking of last Sabbath morning, the Pharisee who went to the temple to pray, that kind of person.

Seneca lived about the time of Paul. He was a scholarly Roman, and a great philosopher, a very great scholar, and was for a time tutor to young Nero, who ultimately became emperor.

But Seneca was not a Christian. And yet, at the same time, he condemned some of the pagan practices round about him in his day. But the trouble was, that he was not above condoning in himself what he condemned in others.

And this is precisely Paul's charge here in chapter 2 against the Jews. And this is the first of two aggravations of their sin in this particular part of the epistle.

First, they condemned the Gentiles for what they did. But they did precisely the same things themselves. Thou that judgest, says Paul, verse 1, doest the same thing.

[3 : 06] Now, there is hypocrisy for you. And they were charged with hypocrisy. And with hypocrisy, that is, generally, blindness.

Blindness to see one's thoughts. So that the Jews here were incapable of seeing the stark inconsistency of their position in condemning people of certain things which they themselves were condoned in themselves.

They were incapable of seeing the inconsistency of this position and incapable of seeing, too, that in their judgment of others, they were condemning themselves, as Paul also says in the first verse.

That's the first aggravation of their sins. And the second is in the words of Altec. That in spite of all their boasted righteousness, of all their privileges, which, and the privileges are listed at the end of this chapter, in spite of the law and of their religion, in spite of it all, they were guilty in heart of despising the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and long-suffering.

This is Paul's charge against them here. This was the aggravation of their sins, in spite of their boasted religion and all that went to make up the religion.

[4 : 30] In spite of their boasted understanding of the law, being teachers of the law, they were in fact despisers of the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance.

And my dear friends, everyone out of Christ needs to be led to repentance. Whether that person is in the blatantly pagan class of Romans 1, or in the respectable religious class of Romans 2, repentance is necessary.

And even when a person becomes a Christian, he still finds constant need for repentance. And the message that is brought before us here today is that the goodness of God brings a man to repentance.

I want them to notice two things about this verse, verse 4 of Romans 2, and the first is this that we have here, a statement made about the riches of God.

And then a question asked about the attitude of man to the riches of God. Then first we notice, a statement is made about the riches of God.

[5 : 55] Our God is rich. Our God is wealthy beyond all human computation. In chapter 11, Paul says, Oh, the depth of the riches.

The depth of the riches. And his riches in that chapter are described as judgments that are unsearchable. And having paths that are unfaceable.

Paths that are path finding out. That here the riches of God consists of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering.

And that's what we want to examine. But before we do so, I want to make this point in passing which we know already. That this phrase, this description of God's goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, that this explains in part at least God's dealings with men and nations today and in every day.

Why is God not cutting short the day of grace? Why is he not hastening the day of judgment? Why is he allowing men and nations to affront his majesty and holiness with such awesome gracefulness as we find today?

[7 : 15] The answer in part at least lies here because of the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering. But Paul is not addressing men and nations here.

He's not even addressing the Jews in mass. He is speaking to one person. Verse 1, Thou art inexcusable, O man, whoever you are.

This is a person, a person address. He is speaking individually here, to individuals, O man. And what the apostle is saying is this, in our text.

He is saying, What, O man, are you doing with the riches of my master? Are you despising them? Well, before we try to answer that question, let us first of all examine the riches themselves. And the first part is the riches of his goodness. The riches of his goodness.

[8 : 26] Now, I think it's very important for us to remember that God's goodness or God's kindness is not confined to those who can say with the psalmist, How great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee.

Not confined to those who fear the Lord, to those who recognize his goodness and who love the Lord. The goodness of God is extended to those who see nothing great in God's goodness, if they see any goodness at all.

After all, this chapter is speaking of hardened Jews, guilty of perversity and hypocrisy and self-righteousness who were anything but Christians.

But Paul says, The goodness of God has been extended to you, hardened as you are, self-righteous and hypocritical as you are. The goodness of God is extended to you. And even the very enemies of God are recipients of God's goodness and kindness in so many ways.

So many people are endowed with gifts and talents. They didn't endow themselves with that. Nor did their parents or forbearers.

[9 : 45] They were endowed really by God. They have a business that prospers. They are given health and strength.

They have a happy home. They are respected and looked up to in the community. And these people themselves will be the very last to acknowledge that no other explanation for this is really tenable but this one.

That their prosperity is due to the kindness, to the goodness of God. And not only is God good in temporal things to so many people but in other ways too.

For example, ourselves in this country, we all live in the land of the Bible. That's a great blessing. Whether a person reads the Bible or not is still a blessing. It has an influence and has had an influence down through the centuries.

And we are living in a land from which the Bible at this very moment is being exported to the heart of atheism. To Russia.

[10:56] That's the kind of country we're in. In spite of all its wickedness and evil and failings. We mustn't forget that. And in this land we have a church, we have a gospel, and we have the faith of the gospel that has been given to us by the apostles.

We have much of the goodness of God all of us in this land whether we recognize it or not. And God has given to every man a conscience which can not only be, which can be moved as well as stifled.

Which can be made sensitive as well as hardened. And which can be instructed as well as deadened and ignorant. And it's because of the goodness of God in giving us a conscience that can be moved and taught and instructed.

It's because of this that the way to hell has been made more difficult for us by God himself in his great goodness and kindness even in giving us a conscience that functions.

that inward monitor that warns us and that can turn us away from danger. Oh how great is the riches of his goodness are the riches of his goodness.

[12:23] Are we despising it? Paul says are you despising O man the riches of God's goodness? Then again there is the riches of God's forbearance.

And these riches are the measure of God's readiness to bear with us. His forbearance is his readiness to bear with us to put up with us to treat us with patience.

and God's forbearance is an extension of his goodness and an illustration of his goodness. And this side of God's goodness concerns those who have offended God who have broken his law who have rejected his mercy and that involves everyone by nature.

Now such an attitude to God offending God the holy and just God such an act of rebelliousness calls for punishment by God himself.

But forbearance means the suspension of that punishment for a time. It means the restraining of God's wrath against those who have broken his law.

[13:42] It means the turning away of God from his anger. We were singing there in Psalm 85 thou tookest off all thine ire and turned from thy wrath furiousness.

In his goodness and forbearance God as it were has put the sword in its sheath and it's still there. And our being in this world blessed as we are in so many ways is an evidence that the sheath is there.

He has not that the sword is still in the sheath he has not cut us off as cumberers of the ground and this is due to his forbearance his patience with us his bearing with us and he has borne a long time with us.

And then there's the riches of his long suffering and the word riches governs each of these I believe not just his goodness but his forbearance and his long suffering the riches of his long suffering and the long suffering of God is a further extension of his goodness a further extension of his forbearance another illustration of his goodness now long suffering is God's forbearance day after day year after year with generation after generation long suffering is forbearance repeated and repeated extended and multiplied the Lord our God is merciful we were singing in Psalm 103 and he is gracious long suffering and slow to wrath in mercy plenteous the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering and these riches are seen in all the richness when we realize one or two things for example that the riches of God are extended to us and the goodness of God is extended to us and even in spite of the knowledge he has of us his goodness is extended to us in spite of the knowledge he has of us and what a knowledge he has of us profound and deep and penetrating every thought and imagination of our heart stands out clearly before him and yet in spite of what he sees in us of the wickedness of our heart in spite of that his goodness is extended to us and it indicates the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering and his goodness is extended to us in spite of what man in spite of God's own greatness as well as God's own knowledge how great thou art how great thou art now many people do not like to see our queen insulted in public and are never impressed with the

Willie Hamiltons of this world who try to gain cheap publicity at the expense of one who cannot answer back but when you think of the insults that are that rise that rise unremittingly to the great king of heaven and to the great God of all the earth we see the riches of his forbearance and long suffering and every time God's name is taken in vain that insult reaches heaven and we're living all around us in this atmosphere today when the name of God is taken in vain and is on the lips of men so often unknown to themselves very often and the insult reaches heaven and yet in spite of the insult against God in his greatness he extends to us goodness and forbearance and long suffering

yes and this is true too in spite of his power in spite of his power he extends to us long suffering and goodness you see some people are patient and long suffering because they are powerless they are in such a position that they can't be anything else but long suffering and patient it's no place to themselves but just the situation in which they find themselves they are patient because they are powerless but God is not in this category never ever

[18:37] God is only to rise and his enemies are scattered God is only to speak and it is done God has only to will it and we fall into the hands of an angry God but in spite of this power to deal with us as he chooses and dealing with sinful rebellious people in spite of that he shows us goodness and forbearance and long suffering and mercy oh the wonder of God's riches the riches of his goodness the riches of his forbearance the riches of his long suffering but there's something else I want to mention and I don't think that it is straining the text to put it this way we have also the riches of his purpose the riches of his purpose and how rich and fertile and abounding is the purpose of God there's nothing niggardly or miserly or parsimonious about our

God and the purpose of God in this particular verse is stated so clearly nothing less than to lead us to repentance and there you have the riches of his purpose what a rich what a fertile what an abounding purpose this is to lead us to repentance and you see what this means not only does God withhold punishment from us in virtue of his forbearance and long suffering but he goes further he takes away the need for punishment by leading us to repentance for punishment is for the impenitent and not for the person who comes with the broken and the contrite heart God will not despise such a person he not only withholds his punishment in virtue of his forbearance but he goes further and he leads us to repentance he takes away the need for punishment now in repentance this grace that is described here as a purpose of God a rich purpose of God this repentance consists of a threefold change in us it involves our minds or our intellect it involves our emotions and it involves our wills as to our mind it means a change of view we see ourselves as sinners as to our emotions it's a change of feeling we are grieved for the sin of which we are convicted and which we see and then it involves our wills in that there's a change of purpose we turn from our sins with a new purpose and endeavour after new obedience now this is what God is leading us to leading us to repentance a change in our intellect in our understanding a change in our emotions a change in our will so that we follow him and we follow him in new obedience that's repentance now to this we are told

God leads through his goodness and not just leads but even more strongly he conducts us he not only points us points the way to repentance but he conducts us to repentance by his goodness how does he do it well for example by giving us more opportunity to repent in that way he is leading us and conducting us to repentance 40 years he gave to the Israelites in the wilderness what of us my dear friends I wonder if this morning we are in relation to God where we were 20 or 40 years ago and yet he is giving us time he is giving us opportunity are we despising the opportunity and making little use of it and then again God gives us encouragement in his goodness for repentance in the goodness of God he encourages us to repent where do we find anywhere in scripture

God saying to us it's too late you need to think of repentance you're beyond it wherever do we find God saying that to us and my dear friends every day an impenitent person awakens and finds himself out of hell is a day of encouragement it's an evidence of the goodness of God and not only does he encourage us to repent but he goes further he actually urges us to repent he commands all men everywhere to repent he calls us to repent he conducts us he would take us as it were he would take us by the sleeve and say to us come this is the way he would put his gentle hand upon our hand and say follow me to repentance this is the way or it may be that he would lay on our hand a rough hand in allowing us in allowing the pain and the disappointment and the poverty of the far country to open our eyes to our own condition feeding upon the food that the swine eats and moving us in that condition to say

I will arise and go to my father that's a hard way he puts a rough hand upon us he lets us out into the far country we suffer there bitterly and the marks of our suffering may remain on us till our dying days but out in the far country we say let the prodigals I will arise and go to my father let's repent and it's the goodness of God that conducts us to repentance that's the first thing we see here in the text a statement is made about the riches of God the riches of his goodness forbearance long suffering and purpose that through his goodness we might repent and believe the gospel now just briefly notice the second thing a question is asked here about the attitude of man our text is in the form of a question and it concerns the attitude of man to the riches of God despises thou despises

thou the riches of his goodness do you not know that the goodness of God leads you to repentance there's a question asked about the attitude of man and here we are brought we have brought before us this sin of which we are suspected despising the riches of God in its various forms as we have it in it there now to despise as we know it's to scorn to look down upon to regard with contempt and to spurn now that's a very strong reaction to the goodness of God that's a very strong reaction and it is held by those who vehemently and bitterly oppose God and all religions they are not merely suspected of despising of turning away from God but their turning away cannot be hid they are openly contemptuous of God it's proclaimed from the housetop they make no bones about hiding it they openly despise

[26 : 55] God and all for which God stands and yet there's another level of despising which in some quarters is more common we despise God when we and we despise God's goodness and forbearance and long suffering when we underestimate it when we treat it lightly God this is not done perhaps militantly or publicly but nevertheless it can be done firmly and definitely by many people who all their days have been under the sound of the gospel they don't openly despise God but they underestimate God's goodness they treat lightly God's goodness they've heard about it so long and so often but still they treat it lightly and my dear friends it all comes down to the same thing when we underestimate God's goodness we despise his goodness whether our despising is declared from the house publicly and vehemently or simply privately in our own hearts and minds and it may well be that there are some here this morning and this is you still not for one moment will you publicly despise the goodness of God or scorn it but yet by your lack of attention and lack of response to the goodness of God you are despising it treating it lightly underestimatingly then you are guilty of despising and Paul says despises thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long suffering not knowing the goodness of God leads you to repentance well now how do we despise the riches of God the goodness of God and the riches of his goodness well first by failing to give it a thought by failing to give it a thought there are so many people who just don't think about God or his goodness that's not their theme it's not their theme to think about the goodness of God their mind doesn't work that way they don't think that way it never enters their minds that they should ever consider such a thing as God and his goodness and forbearance and long suffering they never give it a thought well the ox knows his owner but Israel does not know me says God and the ass knows his master's crib that means that that means that the ass knows the stall where he is fed where his master for his owner feeds him the ass knows the very stall where he can be fed by his master but my people do not consider people under a privilege of having the truth of God and yet in the heart of hearts they are not really considering or giving a real thought to the goodness of God that can lead them to repentance if so then we are guilty of despising and underestimating the goodness of God by failing to give it a thought and again by failing to take it seriously by failing to take it seriously some people think about God and his goodness there is no question of that they think about it but they never pursue it they do give it a thought but that's all they never pursue it they never take it seriously because they think that that

God and his goodness and forbearance and long suffering and repentance that things like these went out with the ark and they're not really applicable to us today in our situation and so they dismiss it they don't take it seriously because it's old fashioned it belongs to the old testament they may say and they don't take it seriously they are despising the riches of God's goodness and then again there are those men despise the goodness of God by failing to understand it properly it's not that they don't think about it it may be that they take it seriously but they misconstruity they misconstruity when they are faced with the question of repentance then they immediately argue this way that this really is for flagrant sinners for those who live scandalous lives for those who commit gross sins but this kind of thing repentance is not really necessary for respectable people such as we are doing our best supporting the church doing good all around and so they misconstruity they think that repentance and God's forbearance and long suffering are concerned only with the person who leads a scandalous life in other words they just become Pharisees they're just like the Jews in the second chapter they think they are beyond repentance they don't require repentance they're good enough by their own good works and that repentance really is for those who are guilty of gross sins and so they despise God's goodness and forbearance and long suffering by misconstruing it by not understanding it properly and then we despise the goodness of God too by failing to benefit from it positively the goodness of God has been given us that we might benefit positively from it his forbearance his holding his sword in its sheath year after

year is in order that we might benefit from it and you see we are despising God's goodness and forbearance and long suffering if we pass through this world and leave this world without ever being led to repentance well if we are guilty today of despising for the militantly

I don't suppose that's true of any of us any person here militantly and publicly from the house stop despising God and his goodness it may be that in the secret of our hearts by our lack of response by our underestimating the mercy of God we are guilty of despising his goodness well then we have done so long enough and we must say with the prodigal I will arise and go to my father and I will say to him father I have sinned I have sinned make me as one of thy high servants and he won't he won't but he'll do this bring out the best robe and put it on him a ring on his fingers and shoes on his feet and bring the fatted calf and let us eat and be merry for my son was dead and is alive again he was lost and is found not a hard servant but a son and a daughter when we come to God in repentance and arise and return to him and when you think of the goodness of God to us today and permitting us to gather here in comfort and in and in privacy and so on to hear the gospel well may the hearing of God's word today and our opportunity to worship God in this place today be a means of leading us to repentance if we have not already come to faith and to faith in Christ and repentance towards our Lord may every evidence of God's goodness pierce those hearts of ours so that we may see it given to us in order that we might repent have a different view of ourselves of our sin have a view of our sin that we might grieve for our sin that we might turn away from it with a new purpose and with new obedience and in faith and repentance is the tear of faith in faith embrace the Lord

Jesus Christ as he is freely offered to us in the gospel despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance let us pray O Lord our God we pray that thou wilt bless thy word to our hearts today and if we have been in any way despising thy word thy law thy riches then cause us to repent and turn away from being despisers that we might become disciples and followers and lovers of the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and strength and mind bless each one of us O Lord as thou seest our need and may we ever marvel at the greatness and the richness of thy goodness towards us and this we ask for Christ's sake

[36 : 38] Amen