

Adult Bible Study Commentary
Living Under God's Mercy
Romans 9:6-18
Dr. Jeremy K. Pridgeon

God's prerogative is God's prerogative alone. These verses remind us that God is not guided by random or arbitrary whims, but by a clear purpose to assert God's power and presence in human affairs. That God can confound us at times is not a new thing! God can and does use those that we might consider unlikely persons to accomplish God's will in the world.

When we read the Bible we know this! We see God at work throughout the Old Testament "surprising" us through persons like Jacob, Joseph, David, Ruth, and so many more. In fact, in this passage, Paul notes that even Pharaoh was used of God to "display my power in you that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

The question for us may well be, "Why does this nature of God, to call upon those who are the most unlikely of candidates in the eyes of the world to accomplish God's purposes, continue to surprise us?" Why do we look with a sense of certainty as to whom God will show favor?

One of the greatest stories in sports this season was the amazing accomplishment of the Coastal Carolina Chanticleers winning the College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska. To win the National Championship, the Chanticleers won a regional at North Carolina State, won the Super Regional by defeating the LSU Tigers twice in Baton Rouge, and defeated Florida, TCU, Texas Tech, and Arizona in Omaha to win the title. The Chanticleers won SIX elimination games!

This was the classic "underdog" story. In the world of Power 5 Conferences, for one of the "little guys" to beat the "big boys" was a great moment. On paper, no one would pick Coastal Carolina to win it all. But this is exactly why you play the game. We will talk about Coastal Carolina winning the National Championship for years to come!

We are just a few weeks away from the kickoff of another religious spectacle in the Deep South – College Football. All of the pundits and prognosticators are making their predictions about the upcoming season. If we just took the matchups on paper, college football would be easy. Big money programs, rich with 5 star recruits and obscene amounts of talent, would be picked to run over lesser level programs. But every year, there are those moments. James Madison (the University, not the late President ☺) beating Virginia Tech, Appalachian State over Michigan, Portland State over Washington State are just some of the greatest upsets of all time. Who will we add to this list this season?

I offer the analogy because we would be well served not to write someone off just because they do not fit our biases for who God can use to accomplish God's purposes. We are all children of God, children of the promise, children who are called to depend upon God daily. There is certainly an air of mystery to this – only from the vantage point that we are not God!

Over the summer many congregations have sent “mission teams” to serve throughout the world. I have had the opportunity to go on several such trips, traveling to Panama, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, the Bahamas, Estonia, and Russia, as well as many experiences here in the US. Sometimes, eager and zealous missionaries are excited to “take” God to these places, sharing with those that they encounter in these settings. Often, however, missionaries seem somewhat surprised to learn that God has been present and at work all along in the locale they are serving! It is a reminder that God is omnipresent – God is everywhere and God is working in and through persons that are often quite different from us. The depth and insight gained is not from us carrying God to those persons, but rather seeing that our understandings of God can be broadened and enhanced in ways we never could have imagined because of our limited worldview.

But often, we need not travel to far away areas to find that God is at work in and around us. Communities can become socially stratified, based on income, wealth, education, employment, race, and other socioeconomic factors. In the creation of our dividers, we may shut out the possibility that God is at work in those that we perceive as different from ourselves. Our challenge, perhaps, reflecting on the passage this week, is to find ways to stretch our capacity to see God in others and see what we might learn of God by engaging others, trusting that the learnings we have, while they may be disruptive or even disturbing to us, won’t disturb God who has been working all along, even as we may have been unaware.

This week, challenge yourself to talk with someone that is not in your normal circle of relationships. Pray that God would show himself to you in the lives of others that you might learn even more of who God is and how God is displaying his power in others that his name might be proclaimed throughout the earth.