

From the Pulpit of Keith Miller
Meadowbrooke Church
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The Riches of God in a COVID-19 World *Romans 11:25-36*

Introduction

There is a lot of talk about being “woke” today. To be “woke” is to be “aware of and actively attentive to import facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice).¹ The phrase “stay woke” describes a state of being self-aware while questioning the dominant paradigm while striving for something better. I believe that the phrase “stay woke” is gaining popularity today not only because of the death of George Floyd, but because at the core of our being, we know that something is very wrong with the world we live in. To look at the issues in our world, especially issues related to racial and social justice, without knowing the deeper reasons why such issues still exist, is to still be asleep. The belief that painting a phrase on the road will help fix a problem that is much deeper than ignorance and prejudice is to be far from being woke.

Do not misunderstand me, I believe that we need laws, that we need better laws, and that we need to continue reforming some of the bad legislation we still have in our nation. However, what we learn from the Bible, what we ought to learn from our own experiences, and what I hope you have been able to see during our time in Romans, is that laws cannot fix the real source of our problem. Racial problems, the failure of justice, murder, crime, and every other problem has to do with the problem with the human heart. What we learn from the Bible about our own selves is simply this: **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it”** (Jer. 17:9)?

As you know, the title of this sermon series is, “Following Jesus in a COVID-19 World.” Did you know that viruses are not considered living organisms? In fact, viruses are more like zombies than anything else currently on planet earth. The closest thing that you will ever come to experiencing a zombie apocalypse is what happens inside your body when infected by a virus. The oversimplified explanation of what happens, is that the virus attaches itself to a living cell, inserts itself into the cell, then replicates itself until the cell dies and then releases more of the virus to do the same to other living cells. If we are all born spiritually dead in this world, then on some level, we are like spiritual zombies. The only cure for our problem is the gospel of Jesus Christ; this is why Paul began his letter to the Romans with these words: **“I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek”** (Rom. 1:16).

The evidence of being made alive spiritually, is love. What kind of love? A genuine love for our Creator and a love for those who are created in his image. The evidence that you have been spiritually “woke” is found in Romans 12:9, **“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.”**

¹ Merriam-Webster definition of the word “Woke.”

Fyodor Dostoyevsky once said, “Every ant knows the formula of its ant-hill, every bee knows the formula of its beehive. They know it in their own way, not in our way. Only humankind does not know its formula.” The formula we were made for is a relationship with God that overflows into a love for our neighbor. There is no room for bigotry or hatred for another human being if you have been made spiritually alive to God through faith in Jesus. This is why the Bible claims the following: **“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death”** (1 John 3:14).

There is only one being who can wake us up from spiritual death, and that being is God. Until you are spiritually woke, you cannot love God or love your neighbor as you ought. I say that because you cannot love God if you do not know him, nor can you know the kind of love for your neighbor that is only possible if you fully appreciate that person as being created in the image of God. God is in the business of resurrecting the dead and you are living proof that he can do it!

In Romans 11:25-32, Paul explains how God has, and is, moving through human history to wake up the dead. In verses 33-36, Paul appropriately concludes with worship.

God is Alive and Well in the Universe

There was a book written in 1970 by Hal Lindsey titled *The Late Great Planet Earth* that *The New York Times* called the number one bestseller of the decade. Since Lindsey’s book was released, there has been no shortage of books outlining future events from the Bible. In fact, hundreds of books have been written on the subject to help Christians understand more clearly how close Jesus’ second coming is. Jesus said of his return:

“See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*” (Matthew 24:4–14)

Did you hear what Jesus said about the end? He said that the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world to all the nations. The Greek word used for nations is the word *ethnos* which literally means *peoples* and refers to Gentile people groups. Jesus did not say that every person from every nation will hear the gospel, but he did say that all people groups will have access to the gospel. Once that happens, the end will come. Of the 17,429 people groups that live on planet earth, just over 58% have been reached leaving 7,397 people groups that are still unreached. Among the 17,429 people groups in the world, there exists 6,500 total

languages; at least some portion of the Bible has been translated into 4,900 of those languages, which leaves us with 1,600 languages that no portion of the Bible has yet been translated into.

In Romans 11:25-32, the Apostle Paul explains how God is moving among the nations. Currently there is a partial hardening that has come upon Israel that will last until, **“the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”** Last week we learned from verses 1-24 that Israel’s partial hardening will not last forever and that God will bring a mass awakening upon the Hebrew people when millions of them will believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and Israel as a Nation will be known for her belief in Jesus as the Messiah. When that happens, Jesus will come to judge the nations and will set up his kingdom in Israel, just as Isaiah prophesied, which Paul quoted in verses 26-27: **“The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”**

However, before all of Israel is saved, both Paul and Jesus said the gospel will first be preached throughout the world so that more spiritually dead Gentile sinners can be made alive in Jesus. When we turn on the news, we should not be surprised to hear about the increasing number of false messiahs, wars, famines, earthquakes, global persecution of the Christians, and the falling away of so-called Christians who publicly renounce their faith they once had in Jesus. It certainly should not surprise us that the love of many is not only growing cold but is morphing into violence. Jesus said that this all would not just happen, but that it would get worse with each passing year as the gospel is *proclaimed throughout the whole world*.

God is alive and He is moving human history in such a way that as many Gentile sinners as possible will hear the gospel and will be saved, and He will do the same with Israel. How sure can we be that God will finish what he started with the nations, and eventually with Israel? Paul tells us in verses 29, **“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”** In other words, when God promises that he is going to do something, he does it. God never goes back on his word nor does he take back what he has given freely! He made a promise to Israel that he will keep, and he is currently fulfilling his promise to bless the nations through the seed promised to Abraham who is Jesus.

When will the end come? It will come when the remaining 7,397 people groups are reached with the gospel. The way God is going to do it is through the truly “woke” in the world who were once dead, but are now alive in Jesus. We are the evidence that a God exists who raises the dead, and we are means by which the gospel will be delivered to the nations.

God is the Center of the Universe (vv. 33-36)

To be spiritually dead is to also be dead to the reason you were born. Think about it. There are only two realities that are possible for humans: You are either the result of random chance that resulted in the evolution of the human species or there is purpose, a design behind all things of which you are the result.

If you are here by chance, then this is as good as it is going to get and the universe revolves around the best and strongest of the dominant species, which is currently the human race. If you are here because God exists and he created you in His image, then you have purpose, and that purpose can only be found in the one who created you. If God exists, which He does, then the

universe does not exist around you, but for Him. The marvel is that God has moved, and is moving, through human history to make Himself known; not because He needs to, but because that is the most loving thing He can do for you.

What is God currently doing among the Gentiles?

“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” (Romans 9:25–26)

He is doing it out of the depth of the riches of His mercy and grace!

How is God calling people to himself?

“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” (Romans 8:29–30)

He is doing it because of his infinite wisdom and knowledge that flow out of his perfect goodness!

Who is God using to call people to himself?

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” (Romans 10:14–15)

He is doing it because His ways are inscrutable, for even though He does not need us, He has chosen to use us to accomplish what He is doing in the world.

Why is God calling people to himself?

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 11:33–36)

He is doing it because He can do it, because He wants to do it, and because He delights in doing it. So, we who have been spiritually woke are able to respond with the apostle Paul: **“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things”** (Rom. 8:31-32)? This is what it means to be “woke” in God’s eyes and this is what it means to be truly alive. Or as the scripture also says: **“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you”** (Eph. 5:14). When God is finished with the nations, and after he honors his promise to Israel, Jesus will return and fix our mess, and then, **“all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”** (Matt. 24:30)

Until Jesus comes, we are called to carry the gospel of Jesus Christ into the nations. This is the only hope for the dead to be made alive, and this is the good news our world desperately needs.