

THERE ARE FRIENDS EVERYWHERE: Romans 11:4.

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Romans 11: 1 – 10.

The immediate question Paul was answering here was the matter of the future of the Jewish people. Given their limited response to the gospel, people were wondering whether God still had a future for the Jews or had cast them off. This is the question posed in Romans 9:6. It is put again in Romans 11:1 and answered in Romans 11:2 with a 'No', God had not cast of the Jewish people. To show us that sometimes it looks as if nothing is happening when actually the Lord is at work, Paul uses the example of Elijah. He felt that he was the only one left of the Lord's people (Romans 11:3). The response from the Lord is that He has actually 7000 of His people who are loyal to Him. Elijah needed to realize that there were more people who were followers of the Lord than he knew about. We sometimes need to be reminded of that too.

1. We can feel we have few friends

As a small church, we can sometimes feel that we are on our own. We are in a culture which has little respect for the Christian faith and the Lord whom we serve. The gap between where we as the people of God and our culture gets wider as time passes. Sadly some churches try to bridge the gap by becoming like the culture. We can wonder who is standing with us. Liberal churches are not but are busy trying to get rid of Christian commitments and beliefs. Charismatics think they are on the brink of taking the world over but are actually being taken over by the world. Reformed churches are often distracted by minor issues or are sleeping.

Elijah wondered where he should look to find friends and thought there were none. He felt the people had not really changed in heart despite being impressed by the signs and wonders on Mount Carmel. He certainly knew he had not convinced Jezebel as she was actively trying to kill him. Out of this he makes his rather rash outburst to the Lord (Romans 11:3). He assumed he was as good as dead, that he had no friends, and that the Lord was not able to do anything about it.

2. Elijah didn't have his eyes open

The Lord brings something of a rebuke to Elijah (Romans 11:4). He had missed out seeing the 7000 that the Lord had reserved and who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Elijah (and we also) learnt from this that the kingdom and its work does not depend on us alone. God is able to pursue His plans without us. Neither is He blind-sided by our

illnesses or weaknesses. We learn that we can be so self-absorbed that we lose sight of other people or feel they cannot help. We can end up making a journey into ourselves so that we stop thinking, or evaluating, or learning from what is around us. We can become so pessimistic that we write off our future or the future of the church. We are guilty of writing the Lord out of the equation and not keeping our eyes open.

3. Noticing our friends.

Perhaps through the last few years as a fellowship, and through the pandemic, we have come to value our friends more. We are able to look out for them and to urge them forwards. We have been able to remember to pray for each other. Each of those people and the churches that they are from are the handiwork of God. He has reserved each and everyone of them for Himself. He knows exactly who they are and how many there are.

He is able to put each of those people in position to be able to help each other. He does that even before they are Christians and is able to seed places with them in advance (See Acts 18:9-10). There are plenty of people who have not bowed the knee to Political Correctness or Cultural Marxism. We salute their stand and they salute ours.

The Lord has a way of bringing these people together and helping them to discover each other. Our paths cross, we meet people at work or at college, or through the Internet. We are able to make contact and then we are encouraged by each other. We should value the '7000'. Elijah did not value Obadiah sufficiently and the contribution that he had bravely made. We should value these people and not forget the people who have shown themselves such loyal friends through the building work.