

Romans: The Good News of God

The Salvation of Israel

Romans 11:23-36

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The Salvation of Israel

Scripture

Today we continue our study in Romans 11. Let's read Romans 11:23-36:

²³And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

²⁵Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

²⁶And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

“The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;

²⁷“and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.”

²⁸As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. ²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. ³²For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

³³Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

³⁴“For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?”

**³⁵“Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?”**

**³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all
things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:23-36)**

Introduction

Students of the Bible know that these verses have caused a lot of discussion and disagreement in the Christian Church. More than one phrase in this passage has provoked rigorous analysis.

For instance, the phrase, “All Israel will be saved” (11:26) is one of them. What does it mean?

There are some who believe that this phrase means that one day the nation of Israel as a political entity will be grafted back into the Church, and that every Israeli will be saved.

Others believe that the phrase refers to a future generation when, before the end, God will bring a tremendous influx of Jewish people who believe in Jesus into his kingdom. And it will be a tremendous revitalization at that time of Christ’s kingdom on earth.

Others believe that this verse simply states that God will continue to deal with the Jews of Israel generation after generation, and that once we get to the end of time we will look back and see this great cumulative work that God has done among his ancient people in all generations.

And still others look at this passage and say, “Well, really, it doesn’t give us any hope at all for Israel in the future. Paul is really just saying that all the Church will be saved. Both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians will be saved. This isn’t speaking necessarily to some future for ethnic Israel.”

Well, having heard that you might be tempted to say, “Look, if all these scholars, professors, and great commentators on Scripture over the generations can’t figure this out, how can you expect me to figure this out? And more importantly, how can I get anything of practical use out of this passage?”

I want to say that in spite of what we may continue to scratch our heads about, there is a core of teaching in these verses that is as clear and practical as the day is long.

Lesson

Paul is summarizing his grand argument in Romans 11. He is making it clear that no one could have guessed God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles and for the Jewish people unless God himself had revealed it. This plan is so amazing that no one could have come up with it on his own. No one could have seen it ahead of time and figured it out, had not God revealed it to us in his word. And in teaching us that, Paul has several important lessons for us.

I. All Jewish People Who Embrace Christ by Faith Will be brought into the Kingdom (11:23-24)

First, all Jewish people who embrace Christ by faith will be brought into the kingdom.

Paul says in verses 23-24: **“And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.”**

Paul makes a very simple argument here, and it goes like this. If God could have worked for the salvation of the Gentiles, so that those who were not a people became a people, and those who were not part of the olive tree were grafted into the olive tree, then it will be a lot easier for God to re-graft those of his ancient people who trust in Jesus Christ back into their own olive tree.

Paul is asserting that all Jewish people who embrace Christ by faith will be grafted into the body of Christ. He's holding out a firm hope for all Jews and he is speaking unequivocally about God's ability to save.

Notice again how Paul puts God's ability to save in verse 23: **“And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.”** Paul is emphasizing the sovereignty of God. He is saying, “There is nothing that is beyond God's ability.” He is emphasizing God's ability to save those who are lost. He's emphasizing God's ability to save those who seem hard to the truth of the gospel.

What a comforting message that is for us today. There can be few in this room who love the Lord Jesus Christ who do not also have family members and friends who do not also love the Lord Jesus Christ. They are not believers, and some of them are very resistant to the gospel.

We bring it up and they say, “Look, we're friends, let's keep our friendship. Don't mention that.” We shake our heads and wonder if God can save them. Paul is emphatically saying, “God has the ability to save. God is the source of salvation. He is sovereign in salvation and there is no one who is too hard for him to save.”

God is sovereign, and what a great encouragement that is to us. Maybe you have been praying for years, like Monica prayed for years for her son Augustine, and you haven't seen results. You need to remember what Paul says here: *God is able to save.*

But that's not all that Paul says. Paul doesn't say that God is sovereign in salvation at the expense of the requirement of faith. Look again at what he says in verse 23, **“If they do not continue in their unbelief.”** You see, Paul is emphasizing the necessity of faith in Jesus Christ. He's not saying God is able to save, and so maybe he's going to save in some way other than faith in Jesus Christ. He doesn't say, “Well, in this case, faith in Christ doesn't matter.” Nor does he say, “Since God is able to save, it doesn't matter whether we believe or not.”

The Apostle Paul always emphasizes God's sovereignty *and* our responsibility side by side without compromising either. Let me put it this way. Paul always emphasizes God's sovereignty, but not at the expense of our responsibility.

Let me put it yet another way. Paul emphasizes the sove-

reignty of God in salvation. He is the source. He is the one who saves without denying that we must believe, without denying that we must respond to the gospel by faith.

Both of those truths he sees as simultaneous truths, neither to be demeaned or de-emphasized. So he holds both sovereignty and responsibility together.

II. God Is Revealing his Plan of Salvation (11:25-27)

Second, God is revealing his plan of salvation.

Look with me at verse 25: **“Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”**

In verse 25 Paul does four things. First, he tells us that he does not want us to be uninformed about the things that he’s talking about. It’s as if Paul clears his throat and says, **“I want you to understand this mystery.”** I’m so thankful he did that, because we might be very tempted to say, “You know, this is very confusing and I don’t really need to know about this.”

Second, Paul tells us why he doesn’t want us to be uninformed about it. That is because this truth, he says, impacts our humility. How does he put it? **“Lest you be wise in your own sight.”** You see, some of the Gentile Christians were **wise in their own sight** with regard to what God was doing with the Jews.

Third, Paul says that God’s dealing with the Gentiles and the Jews in his plan of salvation is a **mystery**. Now, when Paul uses the word **mystery**, don’t think of an Agatha Christie novel.

For Paul, a **mystery** is an *open secret*, if I can use that oxymoron. It is something that once was concealed, but which is now revealed. It is something that we could not have understood unless God revealed it to us in his word, but once it is revealed to us in his word, it is to be declared openly to everybody. It is not something for just super Christians to understand, it is something for everybody to understand, and it is something that every Christian minis-

ter is to proclaim in his preaching.

Finally, Paul says that what God has done with Israel in their rejection of the Messiah has reference to his work of salvation amongst the Gentiles. He says, **“A partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”** God’s strategy is that the Jews experienced a hardening in order that the Gentiles might be blessed with God’s salvation.

And then Paul says, **“And in this way all Israel will be saved”** (11:26a). It seems to me that **all Israel** here refers to all the elect Jews throughout the ages. I do not believe that it refers to national Israel, for it is manifestly clear that not all Jews will be saved. However, just as Paul refers to all believers as the “Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16, so it seems to me that **all Israel** here refers to all the elect Jews throughout the ages. They—the elect Jews throughout all the ages—will **all** be saved.

III. How the Gentile Church Should View Israel (11:28-29)

Third, how should the Gentile Church view Israel?

Paul says in verses 28-29: **“As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”**

The Jews, at the time of Paul’s letter to the Romans (and even today), were enemies of the gospel. They did not believe it. They did not embrace it. Nevertheless, they were the spiritual root of our salvation. We are to love them because Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, our spiritual forefathers, were Jews.

Paul is teaching many practical lessons in this passage. First, Paul is emphasizing for the umpteenth time that whether you are Jew or Gentile, if you reject Christ you are at enmity with God.

That’s not a very politically correct thing to say today. It seems out of date. It seems intolerant. Maybe you’ve heard people over the last several years say, “People that believe things like that bomb world trade centers. If you really believe that your God is the

only God and he is the only way, well, you're intolerant you are a purveyor of hatred in this world."

What Paul is saying is that if you are not a friend of Christ, you are his enemy. If you have not embraced the one true God through Jesus Christ our Lord, he is at enmity with you. That is what Paul is saying. And that is crystal clear.

Someone might say, "Jesus would never say something like that." Listen to Jesus in Matthew 12:30: "Whoever is not with me is against me." Now, that's not some contorted, small-minded, narrow-minded, mean-spirited, fundamentalist extremist. That's Jesus Christ our Lord. "Whoever is not with me is against me."

If what Jesus says is true, and it is, that there is one God, and that he is loved and worshiped and experienced only through faith in Jesus Christ, then to say otherwise would in fact be the ultimate act of hate. If he is the only way of salvation and I tell you that "any way will do," then that is unloving. Because it is wrong.

Second, Paul doesn't want Gentile Christians to boast and view themselves as better than the Jewish people. He doesn't want us saying, "You know, when it all boils down, the fact is that the Jews didn't believe and we did." And we puff out our chests.

Faith is a gift. Faith is the most unnatural thing that there is in a fallen world. Faith isn't something that is innate to the human heart. Faith is an exotic transplant into the human soul. And if Gentile Christians puff themselves up and say, "Ultimately the difference between us and between the Jewish people is that they failed to believe and we believed," they have failed to realize that God gives faith. Faith is a grace, and it is the greatest of graces.

IV. God's Method and Goal (11:30-31)

Fourth, let's notice God's method and goal.

Paul says in verses 30-31: **"For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now re-**

ceive mercy.”

The whole point is that the two are being brought into one. One family, one temple, one house, one tree, one olive tree. God is bringing believing Jews and believing Gentiles together, and making them into this one family, this one body, this one people for himself.

For thousands of years the Gentiles did not know mercy, but now they have been shown mercy as a result of the disobedience of the Jews. And in turn, those Jews who believe in Jesus will be shown mercy. And all will be built into one spiritual house.

So Paul shows us this amazingly intricate, surprising plan of God. Why? Because he wants us to admire the wisdom and the intricacy and the surprising character of God’s plan of redemption.

We could never have made that up. We would never have guessed it. We never would have written that in the story of redemption. Only God could have created such a plan. God’s goal of oneness among his people, Jew and Gentile, is reflected in the reciprocity of his saving plan. What happens to Israel impacts the Gentile, and what happens to the Gentile impacts Israel.

V. God Has Mercy even in Judgment (11: 32)

Fifth, God has mercy even in judgment.

Paul says in verse 32: **“For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.”**

Paul’s point is this: that as there was a time when Gentiles and Jews had been in disobedience, even in those times God was at work for mercy in order to show his mercy both to Jew and Gentile. Paul is again showing us this that we might admire the overwhelming mercy that pervades God’s plan.

Even in this severe judgment against Israel because of her unbelief God has a purpose for mercy.

Now I need to pause here and say very quickly that this passage gives absolutely no comfort to universalists, those who teach that all in fact are saved. That idea is totally out of accord with

what Paul is saying in the context of the passage, and of course, it is also out of accord with what Paul says elsewhere. All people are going to hell unless God has mercy on some. They will be given the gift of faith, and they—and they only—will be saved.

VI. God's Salvation Leads to Praise (11:33-36)

And sixth, God's salvation leads to praise.

Paul concludes his section with a magnificent doxology. He says in verses 33-36: **“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.”**

Occasionally preachers come across passages in Scripture that we feel supremely incapable of doing justice to. We tremble a little when we come to passages like that. Sometimes they are beloved passages which the people of God have treasured up in their hearts for years. They are familiar and it's hard to do justice to a passage where we have years and years of treasured memory and a specialness associated in our minds. This is one of those passages.

This great doxology is compact. The prose is beautiful; the content is shot through with significance. Paul bursts out with ascriptions of praise and honor and glory to God.

Paul lifted up this doxology to God, perhaps spontaneously, as he reflected on the glorious truth which he had been writing down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul meant not only to praise God, but to give us an example of how to praise God.

Conclusion

In the Old Testament there is a book named after its author, whose name means “Who is like God?” The book is Micah. It is a

somber book, because Micah lived in evil days, and his message was one of divine judgment. The people had sinned. They would not repent, and judgment was certain to come upon them.

But Micah is not all about judgment, and toward the end of his prophecy Micah asks the question that his name conveys: “Who is a God like you?” (Micah 7:18). He answers exactly as Paul answers the same implied question at the end of Romans 11:

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity
and passing over transgression
for the remnant of his inheritance?
He does not retain his anger forever,
because he delights in steadfast love.
He will again have compassion on us;
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.
You will cast all our sins
into the depths of the sea.
You will show faithfulness to Jacob
and steadfast love to Abraham,
as you have sworn to our fathers
from the days of old (Micah 7:18-20).

If God were like us, he would never have shown mercy in the first place, for the people of Micah’s day (in fact, of any day) did not deserve it. If he were like us, even if he showed mercy at one time, he would have ceased to show mercy later, because the people would have exhausted his patience.

But God is not like us! Thank God for that! God is God, and there is no one like him. He is “the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty. . .” (Exodus 34:6-7). If God were not like that, there would be no hope for any of us. We would all perish. But he *is* like that, and there is hope.

Think about that, and learn to praise him for it. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAAYER:

Taken from Ray Ortland's *A Passion for God*:

You amaze us, O Lord God. When your offer of salvation is spurned, you do not withdraw it. You extend it more widely. And you come back to the first offer and ensure that it is eventually taken up.

O God, when we see you most clearly, we see mercy. When we see your wrath, we see your mercy behind it. But when we see your mercy, we can discern nothing beyond, for mercy throbs at the very depths of your being.

So this is where our faith comes finally to rest—in your mercy.

We do not have all the answers to our questions about your sovereignty over us. But we do know that you will not betray our faith. You will not abandon us. You will not fail us. Truly, nothing will ever separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You are a God whom we can trust with a full and final trust, because you are a God of sovereign mercy. We surrender ourselves to your mercy right now, confident that someday we will adore you with eternal seraphic fire blazing in our then sinless hearts.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.