

The Prospects of Mercy for Israel #2

Romans 11:11-36¹

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To keep the textual teaching flow of this section of Romans, I will be holding closely to Pastor Russ's manuscript. There are a couple of sections of this text where there are range of interpretations and understandings and I don't want to confuse or deter from what Pastor Russ believes the text says, not that I disagree either. Keep in mind, through these last three chapters, chapters 9, 10, and 11, we have been speaking about the doctrine of election. We began in chapter 9 with Paul explaining the "true" Israel, which are those who are the offspring of promise and rather than biological lineage. In chapter 10, Paul answered the question, "how can I be saved then or know I am saved if it ultimately rests in God's choosing?" His answer is quite simple, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9). Two weeks ago, Pastor Russ lead us into the beginning of chapter 11 where we were taught that Israel's rejection is neither final nor forever. Paul noted that not all Jews were rejected and in fact there was a present-day Jewish remnant, being saved and he used himself as an example. This morning we pick up in verse 11 of chapter 11, where Paul is now going to speak about a future hope of restoration for a portion of ethnic Israel.

So, let's pray, asking the Holy Spirit to help us understand my words, but more importantly, God's Word.

Through their Future Restoration

(v.11-32)

Let's begin. This long section serves three important purposes:

First, it serves to shape Israel's hope of a future restoration.

Secondly, it shows how God's wise purposes and providences vacillate, or swing, between Jewish hardening to Gentile salvation then to Israel's restoration.

And thirdly, it serves to warn Gentiles, mostly everyone in this room, of arrogance, pride and elitism thus spurring them, and us, to preach the gospel to all and to receive all.

Because these three purposes are woven throughout, this text is very complicated and, in some respects, repetitious. Paul is arguing that Jews are rejected so that Gentiles may be saved so that Jews may be really be saved (restored). Therefore, the Gentiles must not be proud, and the Jews must have hope.

Now let's look together at this multifaceted shaping of Israel's future restoration - a hope in large-scale salvation.

Its Intricate Purpose

(v.11-16)

Listen here to the movement of Jewish trespass leading to Gentile salvation. Then Gentile salvation leading to Jewish jealousy and thus, some are saved.

¹¹ So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. ¹² Now if their trespass means riches for

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the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

¹³ Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry ¹⁴ in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

The opening question asks, did Israel's "stumbling" result in their "fall"? Or did Israel forever disqualify themselves from any hope of salvation? Paul's response, "By no means!" Rather, God used Israel's rejection of the gospel, to open the door for Gentile salvation.

Now, I am going to use a phrase to illustrate the point here and I debated on whether to use it due to the way it sounds in relation to the gospel. But, I think it best describes the teaching of Paul in this text. When I say it, don't hear the word used to describe the object in the illustration but rather the value seen in the object. The phrase is "One man's trash is another man's treasure." The gospel is not trash, but it is how they viewed the object itself, the gospel. The ethnic Jews did not see the plan of God for the nation of Israel in Jesus Christ and thought they were saved by merely their biological relationship and thus discarded it. The Gentiles "saw" the worth and value and plan of God in Jesus Christ, in what was discarded, and embraced it, and thus were saved. Which again, would beg the question, "how they could not see it?" and we know the answer, because God hid it from them.

Now, if stumbling of this nation or people meant riches for all of us, think about how wonderful it will be when they come to Christ in belief! For without the Jews, the means in which God used to bring about His plan, we would not have had the opportunity for salvation. We should be rejoicing when they come to the saving knowledge of the gospel. But many times, we hoard our election and belittle those who reject the gospel. That is our pride and arrogance which Paul warns about later in the text.

Let's move to the second portion, v. 13-16. Paul, recognizing this is God's plan all along, says he wants to magnify his ministry among the Gentiles, so that the Jews become jealous and desire what they have. Kind of an odd way to look at it, right? Using jealousy as a means for good. We won't flesh that out here, but you can discuss that thought in your flock on Wednesday night. Let's look at the phrase, magnify my ministry. What does Paul mean by this phrase? He does not mean gloating over his success but rather pouring himself even more into his efforts in ministering to the Gentiles so that they, the Jews, will see how much he is willing to sacrifice for the souls of the Gentiles. And how this will work? Well, Paul is not sure for he uses the term, "somehow" make them jealous enough to desire this salvation.

Notice how verse 15, parallels verse 12. We're looking at "riches for the world" with "reconciliation of the world" in verse 12, and "their full inclusion" and "life from the dead" in verse 15. There is some debate on the meaning of "life from the dead". But because it is paralleling verse 12, I believe it means a great and mighty work not any more than that. The fact that a numerous Jews will be saved is a great and mighty work. In one sense, being raised from the dead is a miraculous event, so their acceptance is such a miraculous event.

Now, verse 16 has been the focus of much debate and discussion also. What is meant by "firstfruits" and the lump and the root and the branches? I am not going to run through all the possible meanings, and sometimes we can overthink and pick apart the details and in so doing, lose its basic meaning. So, for this morning, we are going to view it as a transitional sentence into the next section and see it as communicating that there is an integral unity between the two, lump and loaf, root and branch.

Now, we move into its practical illustration.

Its Practical Illustration

(v.17-24)

¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. ¹⁹ Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So, do not become proud, but stand in awe. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. ²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. 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. ²⁴ 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.

The illustration itself is drawn from agriculture. It is the familiar idea of grafting into one plant the branches of another to produce a hybrid fruit, a new kind of plant or to revitalize the branch through the fresh living sap of the root and trunk. Paul alludes to the process of trimming off a branch to create a place where the new branch will be grafted in. It is not always done that way – a notch may be cut in the stem or trunk with the graftling inserted there.

The olive tree illustration here is the subject of much discussion. Many see the Olive Tree in this illustration as being Israel, due to the Bible's use of the olive tree to represent Israel elsewhere. But, it is Christ that unifies both people groups, think Ephesians 2, therefore, it as though Paul is using the tree here to represent the people of God united to Christ. Christ is the root and stem, the trunk. The natural branches are Israel and the wild branches are the Gentiles. The breaking off is unbelief breaking the union with the people of God. The grafting in is about union with Christ and the people of God by faith. Remember, in the context, Paul has been primarily concerned to show how disbelief is a part of God's rejection of national Israel, while salvation by faith unites to Christ and His Kingdom people.

This illustration highlights several key points in Paul's thinking about salvation history – Paul's eschatology.

First God desires to magnify the glory of His grace through faith and to highlight how destructive unbelief is. The example being Israel's being severed because of their unbelief.

Secondly, we understand that God is demonstrating two sides of His character – His kindness and severity. His kindness in that He chooses to save people at all and His severity in those He condemns. There is no middle road with the Lord. Never minimize these two extremes. If we do, we lose the power of the Gospel and diminish the character of God.

Thirdly, we are pointed to God's purpose and design. While cutting off one "branch" leads to the opportunity of salvation for another "branch" yet those who are engrafted in are vulnerable to being broken off so that He may extend His power to once again engraft the natural branches. Let me advise here, this is not a question of eternal security, it is only a warning. Paul has given similar warnings in Hebrews and other places in scripture.

Finally, we are warned, the Gentile people of God whom He has moved to save, not to become proud of our status, but to stand in awe of our Savior (v.20). Faith is gift of God; may we never own our salvation and make much of ourselves – for pride destroys worship.

Its Humbling Mystery

(v.25-27)

Paul follows this illustration and warning with a mystery. The point of this mystery is to protect us from our arrogance and conceitedness as if we have saved ourselves by our own efforts. He says, (read 25-27).

²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And 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." (Is 59:20-21; Jn 4:22; Hb 8: 8-10)

Now a mystery in the Bible is a truth that has been hidden in the past but is now being revealed, usually with Christ Himself as the key. This mystery is designed to humble all of us before the amazing wisdom and awesome love of God. It is to compel us to evangelize to all with much passion and love.

The meaning of verses 25-26 have also been debated much. Often when this text is read, it is read like this, "a partial hardening happens until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, THEN all Israel will be saved." Reading the text in this way, clamps a framework, or theological grid onto the text. It then insinuates another way of salvation apart from Christ. It espouses a two-covenant theory. Where there is salvation for the Jews apart from Christ while Gentile and some Jewish believers enter in through faith in Christ.

The problem with this is that it is not what the text says. Most modern translations get it right. As the ESV says, "**In this way** all Israel will be saved..." and the NIV, "**And so all** Israel will be saved...". I believe what the text is saying here, is the "partial hardening" describes the present state of ethnic Israel. It is described as "partial" because there is a remnant being saved at this time, along with the full number of Gentiles. Meaning, there is a set number of Gentiles to be saved. When that time has come, then there will be a great number of Jews, far greater than we have yet to see in the history of the world, coming to faith in Christ.

So, God is gathering up His people until all the elect are gathered in, this includes the fullness of the Gentiles and the remnant of the true Israel among the Jews, and at the end, right before Christ's return, there will also be a large number of ethnic Jews coming to Christ when the broken branch is grafted back in and they are accepted once again.

This will all happen just at the time when the Deliverer comes to banish ungodliness from Jacob for He will fulfill His covenant and take away their sins – that is, they will be saved.

Its Underlying Principles

(v.28-32)

Now, the underlying principles.

²⁸ 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. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. ³² For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

We have an overlapping of the enemies and the elect. Paul shows us that ethnic Israel are enemies of the gospel. And he says, it is for our sake. Remember where we started, "their trespass means riches for the world". This bookends the beginning where Paul says, for our sake the Jews were hardened so that the Gentiles may be saved. Ethnic Israel, enemies, but the elect Israel are loved and saved for the sake of the patriarchs. Thus, God moves to bring about His purposes in salvation-history while upholding His faithfulness to keep all His promises to the patriarchs.

This highlights The Perfect Character of God because He is faithful to the patriarchs and doesn't go back on what He has given and whom He has called. You can bank on God. Amid Jewish transgression and Gentile salvation leading to Jewish jealousy and their salvation, God will glorify everyone He has chosen, called and justified. Nothing then can separate us from the love of God and the long reach of His mercy.

This also highlights the Outworking of Salvation History – God will accomplish what He has set out to do – to glorify Himself by calling out the people of His love so that He will be seen to be large in their lives and in the flow of history. He will work with elaborate planning and exquisite execution so that just when the end comes, the fullness of the Gentiles comes in alongside of a great ingathering of the Jews.

And thirdly, this highlights the Overarching Design of God – Verse 32 shows what that arch is: all under disobedience so that all may be subject to mercy. Here is where two all's in one sentence cannot mean the same thing or you have universalism. All- that is every individual is consigned to disobedience so that all, without distinction, Jew and Gentile, may receive mercy.

From an Immeasurable Wisdom

(v.33-36)

And here is our response.

³³Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Deu 29:29) 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?” (Is 40:13) ³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Pastor Russ uses the statement, “To the intricate details of doctrine we respond with incredible declarations of doxology.” I love that. As we grow in our understanding of the deep doctrines and teachings of our Lord and His Word, we grow in our love and delight in the gospel of God. Any moment used to learn and grow in the understanding of the gospel, will be never be a waste of time. No matter how difficult it may be to understand all the teachings of God's word, work hard to learn them for there is a great reward when our understanding is illuminated through His Word by the Spirit. Therefore, Paul prays in his letter to the Ephesians that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ would give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and to what is the hope and riches of the glorious inheritance in the saints. Truth fuels affections – doctrine undergirds doxology.

Its Exclamation

(v.33)

Paul sees the entire plan of salvation from the beginning of time until the end. And in his heart, he can only sing out praise to our LORD. This is what we are to do whether we fully understood what Paul wrote or not. But take what you do understand and examine it, rest in it, and let it resonate in your soul so that its natural outpouring will be delight and wonder, causing you to sing in words and music to your God.

Its Explanation

(v.34-35)

Paul wraps his doxology around the Scriptures, quoting from Isaiah 40:13. This chapter in Isaiah is a rich tapestry of the majestic might and everlasting exaltedness of God. No one can tell Him how things ought to be. And no one can obligate Him to do what He has not purposed to do. No one can put God in their debt. God is utterly free in His grace and His mercy. God is not subject to the critique or criticism of mere mortals, of dust, of jars of clay.

Its Exultation

(v.36)

Why? Because God is the source of all things. God is the sustainer of all things. And is the supreme end and object of all things. Therefore, He is worthy of being magnified and worthy of our recognition of His glory and ascribing to Him the glory that is His due.

All hail the king, our mighty Ruler and our marvelous Redeemer who has moved with wonderful wisdom to make Himself the full and final satisfaction of all He has made us for. Believe in Him. Bow to Him. O, come let us adore Him, now and forever more, world without end.

Reflect and Respond

It has been a deep dive into theology, exegetics, and hermeneutics. So now what? This has been a long and complex text. But let us not lose sight of the big picture. The danger here is that a too close examination of the text will press our noses so closely to the painting that we will not see nor experience its beauty. In the end, don't miss the great comfort and point of chapters 9-11. Here is what you can take home with you this morning, note the kindness and severity of God.

For every believer in this room, know this: You were once not His people, you were once disobedient, insolent, arrogant, God-hating, a rebellious enemy of the one who created you. You were trusting in your own filthy rags, living in the muck and mire of self-exaltation, resistant to the grace of God. But, in the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, for no other reason than He is rich in mercy beyond our comprehension, He chose to save you according to His glorious grace in Christ Jesus. And now, you are His people and you can say with Hosea, "You are my God."

For those here this morning struggling with belief, remember, work to know, and to believe and trust, our Lord has saved you, and He is sustaining you, and He will save you.

For those here this morning struggling with a sin, feeling defeated, wondering about your status with the Lord, remember, your salvation is not based on your works, it is based on the works of Jesus.

For those here this morning feeling like a failure as a husband, wife, or parent, or even as a brother or sister in Christ, you are still His elect. Nothing, absolutely nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The sheer fact you recognize your weakness, communicates humility, and in this, God gives grace. These encouragements express the kindness of God.

For those sitting here, comfortable with your performance and obedience as a believer, beware, lest you think you are where you are because of what you have done. You are in danger of trusting in self, the antagonist of grace. If you are trusting in anything other than the grace of God for your salvation beware. And/or if you believe your obedience is due to your great and mighty efforts, then again, heed the warning. Do not look at others, believers and nonbelievers alike, with contempt. Remember, you are where you are only by the grace of God.

For those sitting here in unbelief, you cannot blame God, remember Romans 10. God sends preachers so that you will hear the message of salvation through Christ Jesus. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. But if you reject what you have heard, you are eternally condemned, and you have no one to blame but yourself.

I believe this quote from Charles Spurgeon sums up this section on doctrine of election well, by saying,

"Whatever may be said about the doctrine of election, it is written in the Word of God as with an iron pen, and there is no getting rid of it. To me, it is one of the sweetest and most blessed truths in

the whole of revelation, and those who are afraid of it are so because they do not understand it. If they could but know that the Lord had chosen them, it would make their hearts dance for joy.”