

The Hopeful Remnant

Romans 11~1-6

The rejection of the Jews and their failure to embrace their Savior, seems to have come to a conclusion at the end of chapter 10.

The Gentiles who were not even looking for a Savior or salvation have had the gospel freely preached to them.

But the Jews – who also have the free gospel stretched out to them by the hand of God too – they are yet a disobedient and obstinate people.

God must be done with them, as they are with God. They are no longer special in the eyes of God in any way. They oppose God, they oppose all mankind, and they oppose themselves.

Israel has become much more like Ishmael – the son of the castout bondwoman – a wild donkey of a man – his hand against every man, and every man against him.

Are the Jews done in God's sight, and therefore in ours? Or as Calvin puts it, 'are the Jews now so entirely alienated from the kingdom as the Gentiles were before the coming of Christ?'

The answer of God in Romans 11 is a glorious one. It is not a maybe, or a hope-so. Paul's answer to Israel's unbelief is:

1. It is part of God's purpose – so let us not be surprised.
2. That purpose has levels in it in God's unfolding plan, with Israel in the present and in the future.
3. That purpose is connected with the gospel going to the whole world. They are broken off that Gentiles would be brought in.

4. This sovereign design is both deep and rich in the wisdom and glory of God – everything funnels down to verses 33-36. This is the exclamation point to be kept before us the entire chapter.

Let us follow the beginning of Paul’s argument – for it is an argument, isn’t it? He wants us to think rightly about these matters – no matter what others may say. Do we believe God on these things or man’s muddied thinking”

He begins with a question – “I Say, God has not cast away his people has he?” And Paul pushes the verb to the front for emphasis – Has He Cast OFF – God that is? His own people?

You can feel how horrified he is in how he puts the question.

Then it is followed by an equally strong expression – $\mu\eta\ \gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\iota\tau\omicron!$
MAY IT NEVER BE!

What is it that is getting Paul so worked up?

Well it is partly because Paul counts himself as one of his kinsmen who believes! Like those 7000 faithful reserved in the days of Elijah, he and many others are the remnant gloriously set apart by God’s choice by grace – 11:5.

How does Paul make his point that God is not done with the Jews, in this opening paragraph?

We must see around the corner that there is something for the Gentiles because of their stumbling. And we can also see something changing later for the Jews in the future.

But right here we have important points to drive home how we are to think of this matter. How are we to think of the Jewish people – who were such a pivotal nation in the Bible?

First, Paul insists not all Jews are in the same boat. Just as they are not all saved, neither are they all lost. And he points to himself in a double-way.

First, Paul's own conversion stands out as such a strong model for other Jews who were trusting to their works and not to grace in the Messiah. See how he uses his lineage in a different way in Philippians 3 – you recognize this well.

I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (3:4-7)

Paul was at the top of his class in self-righteousness, in being a Jew of the Jews. But God showed mercy to him.

He didn't become a non-Jew in order to be converted. But he was stripped of all reliance in that heritage for acceptance with God.

That is the second thing here – Paul, who was not forsaken by the Lord, loved his heritage. But he came to love it in the right way.

Who would not love such a legacy! We Gentile Bible-believers do! Whether we are east or west, we travel back and learn of Abraham's pilgrimage and sacrifice of his son Isaac; the birth of Jacob and Esau;

of the ups and downs of Joseph in Egypt, the Exodus and Passover. These become our heroes, our models, our templates for faith and repentance and struggle with sin and love for God and holiness.

But we have the advantage. As wild branches engrafted into this family of faith, we are not so tempted to trust in such a heritage. Who of us would ever say “I’m going to heaven because I am Vietnamese, or American, or Irish or Italian?”

We still lean on other things as our righteousness. We lean on our orthodoxy, our religiosity, our church attendance or worship, or giving our time, gifts, money, and sacrifices. Or we lean on what we don’t do – we don’t drink alcohol, or do drugs, or sleep around.

This first point shows God still has his elect people coming to His Son, Jesus Christ, from among the Jews. As Paul is a great model for the whole church, the gospel is to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

And then the **second point** – Paul’s reference to the discouragement of Elijah and pleading with God against Israel.

What a great part of the Bible – the ministry of Elijah. His name boldly means: ‘My God is Jah – Jehovah!’ He is the fiery prophet! Second only to Moses! The reformer of Israel!

But Paul refers to a low point in Elijah’s ministry. Why? No doubt, because of how mistaken Elijah was about being the only faithful follower of the true God.

Again, we take two things from what Paul says.

First, Elijah was not entirely wrong to plead *against* Israel. The Prophets often acted like a prosecutor against criminal Israel. Elijah

was no different. He was raised up in a very low point of the northern Kingdom's history. It was the tipping point, when that unholy couple ruled. One writer called them: "the bloody, beastly idolater Ahab" and "that monster of depravity Jezebel."

But, secondly, the more major reason this is quoted is how wrong Elijah was when he said, 'I alone am left'! Elijah, who like his successor Elisha, had his eyes opened, missed the 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

7000 is a symbolic number for fullness and spoke of more than that number.

Paul's point is to carry that to the present.

Yes, many Jews turned away from the Gospel in obstinate unbelief and stubborn disobedience. Paul himself could speak like a NT Elijah and accuse his kinsmen of worshipping a false god in rejecting the Son.

But look at the book of Acts! 3000 died when the law was given, but 3000 Jewish men were made alive on the day of Pentecost – besides women and children. In Acts 4, 5000 Jewish converts. And in spite of the Jerusalem persecution in Acts 8, Acts 21 finds many myriads, that is many thousands of Jews who had believed and are zealous for the law.

So as bad as things were in 8th century Samaria, and as bad as things were in 1st century Jerusalem, God had his remnant. A remnant not according to works, not according to self-righteousness, but according to grace. And what grace indeed!

Let this lead us to our **third point** as to how this applies today.

We entitled this message, *A Hopeful Remnant*; indeed hope runs all throughout this difficult chapter.

That hope arises not from the earth but descends from heaven; it is from above and not below; of the Lord and not of man.

Behold what hope of grace was there in God's power to break through the hard-heartedness of a Saul of Tarsus?

This is the reason why election, God's saving us and not man saving himself, is the only way, the hope-filled way, otherwise none would be saved!

The love of sin is too strong in the flesh-loving, idol-fooled, mentally muddled Gentiles. Has that changed today? Our world cannot even get the genders right about itself!

But here is something stronger and more stubborn – the love of self-righteousness in the self-trusting Jewish camp.

My counseling professor in seminary once said if you had the choice between a bar or a liberal church moving in across the street of your congregation, take the bar every day! You have a better opportunity to reach souls that know they are living in the bottom of a glass, than those sipping the narcotic spirits of a false gospel. As Niebuhr – himself a liberal put it – they serve a God without wrath who brings men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through a Christ without a cross.

But God is able to reach both! He reached self-absorbed Saul – He can reach anyone! That is a message full of true hope.

Then God still has a purpose amongst the Jewish people, whom Paul is about to say have been broken off of the privileges she once had.

God still calls forth gospel seed out of this rotten apple. And he is going to change that whole apple too.

It bears repeating – if God is against you, it doesn't matter who or what is for you. And if God is for you, by his grace, even a heritage that is ruined, cannot keep you down.

Sin cannot be ultimate if there is a gospel greater than all your sin. And if there is a gospel full of grace for all sin, then man's righteousness, his good works, cannot be ultimate to salvation. Either it is all of grace, or it is all of works. There is no middle ground.

Then one more thing: consider the contrast between the Jews of Elijah's day and those of Paul's.

We said Elijah was right to prosecute the northern kingdom. Ahab kicked out and persecuted Levitical priests. Ever since the days of Jeroboam, Baal worship had been set at Bethel and Dan. So now true worship of the true God at Jerusalem had been replaced by the filthy worship of Jezebel's gods – including human sacrifices. And when voices were raised against that politically correct position, the prophets were killed.

But as bad as all of that was, God had a people underground; a people without the means of grace available; without a temple or church to gather in and be built up. Yet God kept them.

Now compare the sins of Israel in rejecting the Messiah, the Son of God come in the flesh! The same God who sent prophet and sage time

and again to gather glory from his vineyard, all mistreated, rejected, and some put to death. Now God sends his Son – surely they will respect my Son! My Son who comes full of grace and truth! My Son Who comes with all love and openness! My beloved Son Who was pointed out by the greatest OT prophet, John the Baptist, who moved all Judea with his mighty message! My Son Who comes with more wonders and miracles than any or even all OT miracles, and Who speaks as no man ever spoke! Whom to see was to see the Father, to see God!

And they put Him to death in a most deceitful, evil and cruel way!

And Who when He arose triumphant in glorious life, and poured out that life on his poor, ignorant, weak followers, they lied about His resurrection and persecuted His disciples!

And yet this Jesus still says today:

³⁷ "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. ³⁸ "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! ³⁹ "For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'" (Mat 23:37-24:1)

Oh how their God has plowed them under – especially in the awful destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD!

Our ways are simply not in keeping with God's ways – oh, pray for mercy!

But thank God, His ways are not our ways – have hope! That is the glorious message of chapter 11 in Romans! And it is a message for us today!