

Romans: A Remnant Believes, Just as Promised

Romans 11:1-5

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 11. We're continuing to study our way through the entire book of Romans, and today we come to the 11th chapter which is the last chapter in the so called theological portion of the book. Chapters 12 through 16 are concerned with practical matters and the Christian life, the answers that Paul gives to those practical issues are of course based on what he has taught in Romans 1 through 11 in the so called theological section. Chapter 11 is also the last chapter in a three-chapter section in the middle of the book in which Paul is concerned to address the so-called problem of Israel. That is the question of why Israel, the old covenant people of God, have rejected the Messiah, prophesied in the old covenant to come for Israel and of course for the Gentiles? Why is it that God's own chosen people from old covenant times, the descendents of Abraham, spiritual as well as physically, why is it that so many within Israel have turned their back on the gospel, turned their back on the message of Jesus Christ, and rejected His claims to be the Messiah?

Paul has been dealing with that very issue in Romans 9 and 10. In fact, Romans 9, 10, and 11 form a three-part argument, in which Paul gives three answers to the question, why has Israel rejected God? In Romans 9, his answer had to do with the sovereignty of God, and especially God's electing love and mercy in which He has chosen some and passed by others. In Romans chapter 10, his answer had to do with man's responsibility, and especially the essentialness, the centrality of faith, and of course, he speaks of Israel's lack of faith in Romans chapter 10 as an example of their disobedience. Their knowledgeable, willful disobedience to the word of God is why they refused to believe and why they have not come to receive the promises made to Abraham.

When he gets to Romans chapter 11, he has yet another argument, yet another line of reasoning in order to help us to understand Israel's rejection of the gospel. Now, before we turn to Romans chapter 11, perhaps we ought to say one more thing about its practicality. How are the contents of Romans 11 relevant for day to day Christian living? Isn't the subject of Israel in the plan of God purely speculative and theoretical, and not practical in terms of the way we live our

Christian life? Well, what is a Christian who is struggling with marriage, or having difficulty with parenting, or dealing with serious moral deficiencies or issues in his life, or struggling with vocational matters, what is a Christian in that kind of situation to learn from what God teaches about His plan of salvation and Israel's part in it from Romans chapter 11?

That's a good question. Let me offer a quick answer, in fact, let me offer four quick answers to that question. The first thing is this: this chapter reminds us of the importance of a vital relationship with God through Jesus Christ, because throughout this chapter we're going to be told about people who had exposure to the Bible, exposure to the promises of God, sat under faithful preaching, not only for years and years, but centuries and centuries, and yet didn't know God, and that reminds us that in religious communities today, including the church, people can go through all manner of efforts to know God and in the end not know Him. That means that we must take care ourselves to see that we are trusting in God through Jesus Christ, that we have received Him by faith, that we're walking with Him and that there is a vital personal faith. Romans 11 reminds us of that stark truth just because of the material that it covers.

Secondly, in this great passage, we learn about the trustworthiness and the faithfulness of God. You see, the question that Paul has raised is a question that raises the issue of whether God can be trusted, and that is a very practical question for a Christian to have an answer to. You see, if you ask the question, "Has God failed to keep His promise to Israel?" then the next question you're going to ask is, "Well, if the answer is, 'Yes, He's failed to keep His promise to Israel,' will He keep His promise to the church?" And so having a firm answer to the question, "Has God been faithful to Israel?" is actually most practical answer for you in believing that God will be faithful to you.

Thirdly, as we look at this great passage, it confirms that our attitude toward the Jewish people ought to be of a sincere desire to see them brought to a saving knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. You know, from the very first days of the early church, there were Jewish persecutions of the early Christians, and over the course of years, as the church became more and more Gentile, a certain type of hostility grew up against the Jewish people. Sometimes in the Middle Ages it would break out in pogroms against the Jewish people in various parts of Europe. And yet Paul in this passage, and elsewhere, supplies for us what ought to be the Christian's attitude toward the Jewish people: not to see them as scapegoats to be stoned, but as those whom we ought to pray to the Lord that they would be objects of His mercy, that they would find the knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ. And we learned that in Romans chapter 11.

One last thing. This chapter is about the big picture, it's about the plan of God, and that in and of itself is most helpful and practical. You know, sometimes when we are down in the problems of life we lose the big picture in the details. You know, we're struggling in our marriages, we're wrestling as parents, we're having

a hard time at work, or with our colleges, and the details are overwhelming to us. We feel as if we're never going to come back up for air, and being able to pull back for a moment and realize that we are part of a big plan, a much bigger plan, a plan that's far bigger than our own problems, our own circumstances and the particularity of our own situation is actually quiet refreshing. To pull back for a moment and realize this is not all about us, it's about His plan, it's about His glory, that is not only practical, it's essential, without it we cease to truly live. So for all those reasons and frankly for many more, the study of Romans chapter 11 is far from speculative or theoretical, but practical and essential for healthy Christian living. So with that as an introduction let's hear God's holy word in Romans chapter 11 in verses 1 through 5.

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED THY PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN THINE ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice.

Amen. Thus ends this reading of God's holy inspired and inerrant word. My He write it's eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Lord, this is Your word, open our eyes that we might behold wonderful things in Your law. We ask, O God, that You would enable us to see the Savior, to appreciate the glory of the mercy of Your plan and to embrace it and Him by faith. This we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

So, why is this question so important to answer? Why is the question of verse 1 so important for us to answer? Why do we ask the question, "Has God rejected Israel?" and why is it so important to answer? Well, Paul would give you many replies to that, but first and foremost it is important because the question, "Could God reject the church?" is a very significant question to answer. Paul, you see, has been wrestling with the issue of the role of Israel in the plan of God since at least Romans 9. He's introduced the problem early on in the book of Romans, but especially beginning with Romans chapter 9. And in the first few verses in the chapter he's been concentrating on answering the question, "Why would it be that God's old covenant people who had been given the Scriptures, who'd been given the promises, who had a wonderful heritage of truth and teaching from the law, from the writing and from the prophets, why would they reject the Messiah, why would they reject the gospel if the law, and the prophets, and the writings all testified to the Messiah? Why would they reject the gospel if the law, and the

prophets, and the writings all testified to the gospel?"

That question Paul has been grappling with for two chapters, and in chapter 9, as we said, he pointed us to the sovereignty of God and he said, this is part of the mysterious plan of God. In chapter 10 he said, but you also have to realize that men are responsible, and they are responsible to believe because God had made it plain that He is to be believed and trusted, and yet Israel in her disobedience has refused to believe.

In Romans chapter 11, he's going to give a third answer to that particular question, but before he does he reiterates in asking the question himself, and notice he emphasizes that in verse 1. "I say then, has God rejected His people," or "God has not rejected His people has He?" In reiterating this question himself, he is setting you up in order to hear His emphatic answer, and what's his answer in verse 1? "Absolutely not. God has not rejected His people." Paul asks this question having been talking about Israel's rejection of God in chapter 10. In chapter 11 he turns the question around and he asks, has God rejected them? He gives an emphatic reply of, no.

I'd like for you to see two things that he does in verses 1 through 5. In verse 1, Paul gives us his answer to the question, has God rejected Israel? No. He's going to spend the rest of the chapter telling you why that's the case, demonstrating to you, proving to you that it is the case that God's promises have not failed, that God has not failed to come through, that God is indeed trustworthy and that His word can be taken as absolutely true, and he's going to give a variety of arguments. In the passage that we are going to look at today, he gives two arguments as to why God's promises have not failed and why it is true that God has not rejected His people. The first argument you see in verse 1, and it's a one-word argument: me. The second argument you'll see in verses 2 through 5 and it is: them. His first argument, his first exhibit for the defense is: Paul the apostle. He says, I am evidence that God has not rejected His people. Then he sort of turns his eyes out on the Roman congregation and says, now look at all those Jewish Christians in your midst. They are evidence that God has not rejected His people. There is a remnant today. Those are the two parts of Paul's argument. Let's look at what he says then in verse 1.

I. Paul's salvation is evidence that God has not rejected His people.

Paul teaches that God has not rejected His people and that this can be demonstrated by His own salvation. Paul says, I too am an Israelite, a descendent of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. And so Paul starts off by saying, of course God hasn't rejected His people, I'm a Jew and I'm a Christian. Therefore God has not turned His back on the promises that He made to His people who believe in Him. I'm a Jew and I'm a Christian. Now, I'd like you to see two things about the way Paul argues this point in verse 1. One of them is explicit

and one of them is implicit. In verse 1 he describes himself as a Jew in three ways. He says, I'm an Israelite, I'm of the seed of Abraham, and I'm of the tribe of Benjamin. He's an Israelite; he is a Jew indeed. If anybody thinks that Paul is anti-Semitic, he starts off by saying, let me remind you, I am a Jew myself. Then he says, I'm of the seed of Abraham. I am descended from the one who is the forefather of Israel and who is the example of Israel in faith. I am descended from him; I'm physically descended from him.

And then he says, furthermore I'm of the tribe of Benjamin. He's telling them where he's from. You know, we do that in the South. We meet somebody new and we say, "Who's your daddy?" You apply for a job, first question you get asked, "Who are your folks? Are you from around here?" We want to know where you're from. Well, Paul is telling you where he's from and by saying he's from the tribe of Benjamin. He's actually making some good claims. You may remember some fairly unpleasant things about the tribe of Benjamin from the book of Judges. I do, and also from the book of Joshua, but there were some good things about the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin, for instance, you will remember, is the only one of Jacobs' sons who was born in the land. Furthermore, Benjamin is the territory in which the city of Jerusalem sits in the land of Israel. Furthermore, when the ten tribes of the north rebelled against the king of Israel who would become the king of Judah, and when they rebelled against Judah and set up their own worship to the gods at the two cities at the north, Benjamin was the only tribe who stayed with Judah aligned to the God of Israel. So, for all these reasons Benjamin had a choice roll. And Paul is saying, my pedigree is impeccable and yet through I am a Jew of Jews, yet I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah, so I am living proof, I am exhibit A that God has not rejected His people.

That's the explicit thing that he says, but implicit in this is also another reminder, and that is that Paul, when he was Saul of Tarsus was the major threat to the existence of the church. Saul, humanly speaking was the person who came closest in the history of Christianity to extinguishing the church. Saul of Tarsus, he was public enemy number one to the church. He was the Osama bin Laden of his day, as far as the Christian church was concerned. When they heard the name of 'Saul of Tarsus' they saw in him the greatest threat to their own personal welfare. And Paul is saying, look, if I can be saved then anybody can be saved. If any Jew ought to have been rejected it should have been me and look at me, I'm not only saved, I'm preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Isn't Paul a standing hope? Isn't he a standing representative of hope to us that all those friends and relations of ours that we so vainly hope will embrace the Lord Jesus Christ. Is he not a standing representation of hope that anybody can be brought to the Lord? If anybody should have been rejected, if anybody wasn't a candidate for salvation, it was Saul of Tarsus and yet God made him the apostle to the Gentiles.

My friends, that's a great encouragement for us because there may be some of you who are thinking, 'You know, there is something I have done in my past that

disqualifies me from being a Christian, I'll never be able to follow the Lord Jesus Christ." Then, there is the Apostle Paul waiting for you and he's saying, "Look, if there is anybody like that it was me." I mean, Paul says quiet plainly doesn't he, "I am the chiefest of sinners." He's not using hyperbole. He meant it. So you say, "I can't get close to Christ because there is something in my past," the Apostle Paul wants to say, "No, no, no step aside, I'm first in line here. If there was anybody who had something in his past, in her past that could keep him from God, that could keep him from Christ, it's me, and look at me, I'm following Him. I'm telling of His praise." So, what's keeping you from God is not something in your past it's something in your present, you're refusal to simply trust in Him because when you trust in Him you find that He wraps the everlasting arms around you and He saves you from all your sins. So the Apostle Paul is saying, it's not something in your past that keeps you from Him, it's something now; it's the refusal to believe in Him. He's such an encouragement to us that all can come to the Lord Jesus Christ and bring their burdens lifted and their sins forgiven. That's the first thing we learn in this great passage. God's continuing mercy to Israel is made manifest even in the salvation of the Apostle Paul, but there is a second thing as well.

II. Believing Jews are evidence God has not rejected His people.

If you look at verses 2 through 5, Paul makes it clear that God has not rejected His people and this can be seen from the present remnant of Israel. He states the case this way. God has not rejected His people whom He *foreknew*. That's that word for God's foreknowledge, His fore love, His eternal love for His people from the foundation of the world. And he says, God can not reject those that He has set His love on before the foundation of the world and He says, let me prove it to you from Scripture.

In verses 3 and 4 he takes you back to the story of Elijah, and you remember Elijah as he contested with the prophets of Baal. Almost all of the prophets of the Lord in the northern kingdom in Elijah's day had been slaughtered by the wicked king and his wife, and Elijah felt utterly alone and isolated as he opposed this idolatry. At one point he even cries out a prayer to the Lord against Israel, "Lord, I'm the only one left who believes in You. I'm the only one who worships the God of Israel, they all worship idols now, they worship the Baals of Canaan."

And Paul says in verse 4 that God's divine response to Elijah was, "No, Elijah, there is still a significant number of people in this land that worship Me," but of course that's not quite how he says it in verse 4. He says, "There are still seven thousand that I have kept for Myself." Paul inserts those words, *for myself*, into that quotation to emphasis that it's God's grace that has kept them. It's not something special in them or about them. It's God's grace who has kept them for Himself and he says, "Look, if God was keeping a remnant for Himself in Elijah's day, so also, He keeping a remnant of Israel in this day." And he looks out on the

Roman congregation and he sees Jewish Christians there and he says, "Look you're the remnant that God is keeping for Himself today at the present time." He draws the conclusion that just as there is a remnant then, so also there is a remnant now and it's all due to God's gracious choice.

Look at the way he put it in verse 5. "There has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. So his point is that God continues to show His mercy to Israel and that that is manifest in His gracious choice of a continuing Jewish remnant. There are still Jewish Christians and there always have been in every generation. This reminds us of the mercy of God, for surely Israel should have done better than she did. And yet God continues to be pervasive in His mercy towards Israel, and God's mercy toward the likes of us ought to make us hopeful for His mercy for others and desirers of His mercy for others.

See, in this passage Paul is reiterating that God can be trusted and in the end when someone stands and believes in the Lord and embraces Him for salvation, it is all due to the gracious choice and mercy of God. Now, I can't imagine something more practical or more comforting than that. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we would embrace Jesus Christ by faith and we ask for Your mercy, that by the Holy Spirit our eyes would be opened and we would see that the Lord is God and worship Him, bowing the knee and calling out upon Him whom You have given the name which is above every name, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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