

Romans: A Hardening for Mercy's Sake

Romans 11:11-16

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This chapter has been the occasion of many disputes and interpretation over the matter of God's dealing with Israel and the end times. There would be some who come to this chapter and say that this chapter predicts that Israel will come together as a nation in the end time, that there will be an almost or complete conversion of Israel as a nation state to God and that there will be a reign of one thousand years of that nation state on earth prior to Christ coming. Then others have said, "No actually this passage says nothing about the Israel of the future, it's all about the present, it's all about Paul's contemporary time frame and there is no future role for Israel in God's plan of redemption." So, there have been many disputes about what it means.

The famous Southern Presbyterian theologian, James Henley Thornwell, when he was about forty years old, received a letter from a man inquiring as to what were his views of the end times, and especially of Romans 11. Thornwell wrote back a letter and he said, "I'm only forty years old and I consider that too young to have an answer to that question." That was very encouraging to me. I was just asked this last week, "What's your view of Romans 11?" I said, "I'll tell you when I get to the end of it." I'm learning with you as we go through and I trust God will speak to us directly as we learn together from His word, because the main points of Paul in Romans chapter 11 are crystal clear. We'll look at verses 11 through 16 together today.

Before we do, let me just say two or three things. First, Paul is dealing with the question of, "Has God failed to keep His promises to Israel?" He made certain promises to the patriarchs. He made certain promises to David. Has He failed to keep those promises to Israel? Or, to put it this way, "Has God rejected His chosen people of Israel?" That's the big question that Paul opens with in chapter 11.

He has answered it so far in two phases. He has answered, "No" and "No", and he has answered it by using himself as an example and by pointing to other Jewish Christians. That is, others around him who are ethnically Jewish, but who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are a part of his church. First of all he says,

look, I Paul, am a Jewish man and Christian. I trust in Jesus the Messiah, and that shows that God has not rejected His ancient people Israel, because here I am, a Hebrew of Hebrews and I am a believer in the Messiah. So I am Exhibit A that God's promises have not failed.

But, he's not done. He goes on in verses 1 through 5 of Romans 11 to give an argument that the remnant of Israel, the many other Jewish Christian of His time are also evidence that God has not failed in His promise. He says, "Look around you." Even to the Roman Christians, many of whom were Gentiles, he says, 'look in your own church, there are Jewish Christians in your own church. That shows that God's promises have not failed.'" And so he points to this remnant of Israel that believes in the Messiah.

But Paul is not finished yet. Beginning in verse 11, he begins to develop another part of his argument to show that God has not indeed failed in His promises to His ancient people. That's where we are going to be looking today. So let's hear God's word in Romans 11 beginning in verse 11.

I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? And if the first piece of dough be holy, the lump is also; and if the root be holy, the branches are too." Amen. This is God's word, may He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for this word, and we ask that You would teach us from this word. It is possible when we look at this passage that we wonder if it directly speaks to us today in our own situation. Show us once again just how official your word is to every situation and give us cause to thank you for it. In Jesus name. Amen.

Paul is preaching in this passage, to a congregation that is made up predominantly of Gentile Christians. There are Jewish Christians that are part of the congregation and there is a larger Jewish community which would have some sort of contact, perhaps, with this congregation in the city of Rome. But, Paul is speaking in a context where Gentile Christians are the majority party. And they, perhaps, themselves think that the greatest thing that God has done to this point in His great plan of redemption, which has been unfolding in history, has been to reach out to the Gentile world and to bring them to the Lord Jesus Christ. And who can argue with the greatness of that? Who would have thought that five or six or seven hundred years ago, that within a matter of years of the ministry of the Messiah, there would be more Gentile believers in the Messiah than there

were Jewish believer in the Messiah. That particular reality also was leading to a misapprehension and a misunderstanding on the part of the Gentile Christians. Some of them had thoughts of anger and a lack of love towards the Jewish people in whose community found themselves. Many of them had experienced persecution from the Jewish people and so there was an antipathy between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, and then those who were Jewish and not following the Messiah. Paul, in that context wants to correct some misunderstandings on the part of these Gentiles.

Then, in the course of this passage, he teaches them two or three things and I'd like you to see them with me today. First, in verse 11 Paul shows us how God's plan is gracious. Then if you look in verse 12 and then skip down to verses 15 and 16, he shows us how the salvation of the Jews is designed to be a blessing for the Gentiles. Then thirdly, in verses 13 and 14, he shows us what our attitude as Gentile Christians ought to be toward the Jewish people. I'd like to walk through this with you very briefly today.

I. God's plan is gracious.

Let's begin in verse 11, here's Paul's first point. He says, I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall did they, may it never be, but by their transgressions, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make them jealous. Paul is doing two things in that little verse. He is denying that God's purpose in Israel's rejection of the gospel and of the Messiah was to cause Israel to finally fall. Secondly, he is denying that God is done with Israel. He's says, no God still has a future hope for Israel.

Look what he does. He begins by asking a question, they did not stumble so as to fall did they? And he answers, "Absolutely not. God forbid, may it never be." So, he gives a "no" answer.

Now, you may have been expecting him to say "Yes." You may have been expecting him to say, "Well, yes, Israel stumbled over the stumbling stone and they fell. Yes they did fall finally. God is done with them." But Paul's answer is the opposite. He says, "No, no God didn't do it for that purpose and God is not finished with His people yet." Paul's answer to this question is an emphatic, "No." On the contrary, in verse 11 he says God had two purposes in sending His son into the world and being rejected by His people and sending the apostles in to the world and their gospel being largely rejected or neglected by the Jewish people of their time. He said God had two purposes.

First of all, look at verse 11. By their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Paul says, in God's wisdom, He used the unbelief of Israel to result in the salvation of Gentiles all around the world. So, God had a gracious purpose even in the sin and unbelief of Israel. But that's not where Paul stops. That's

where we usually stop. Lord, though the Messiah came to Israel and His own received Him not, yet we received Him and that's true, but that's not where Paul stops. Look at what he says at the end of verse 11: "To make them jealous." To make who jealous? To make the Jewish people jealous.

Now, Paul uses a provocative phrase here and we'll explain it in just a few moments, but Paul's point is this. The conversion of the Gentiles itself has a view to the evangelism of the Jews. The conversion of the Gentiles, has a view to the benefit of the Jewish people.

Now you say, "Oh that's all well and good and that's very interesting and that's an interesting unveiling of the secret plan of God, but what in the world does that have to do with my day to day Christian walk?" The answer is at least this. Doesn't God, in doing this as part of His plan bringing blessing out of sin and judgment, bringing blessing out of conversion of the Jews, does that not in and of itself teach us how God uses the severest judgments for the purposes of grace? How God always has a purpose to bring blessing out of cursing, and isn't that an important thing for us to remember? Isn't it an important thing when we see, for instance, Christians martyred in other lands, to remember that the blood of the martyrs is sealed and God uses it for His own gracious purposes. Isn't it important to see when we experience hard things in our own lives, isn't it important for us to see that God's gracious purposes are always at work, even in the hardest of circumstances. Well, certainly we learn this here, because as God had a gracious plan in the sin of Israel, so also he had a gracious plan for Israel in the salvation of the Gentiles, so that He brought blessing out of a very difficult situation, a situation of judgment and unbelief. That's the first thing that Paul teaches us in this passage.

II. The salvation of the Jews is a blessing for Gentile believers.

The second thing is this, and you will see it in verse 12 and in verse 15, a parallel verse to verse 12. It echoes what Paul has just said. He repeats himself so as to be understood. In this verse, Paul is showing us how the salvation of the Jews is a blessing for Gentile believers. Paul suggests this. He makes an argument. He says, if it was a blessing to the Gentiles that Israel, by and large, rejected the Messiah, how much greater a blessing to the Gentiles is it going to be when Israel accepts the Messiah? If it's a great blessing to the Gentiles when Israel rejected the Messiah, how much greater a blessing is it going to be when Israel is reconciled, when Israel embraces the Messiah? Look at his words, "if their transgression is riches for the world, and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be?" Then down to verse 15, "if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" So Paul is saying that if blessing resulted to Gentile Christians all over the world because Jewish people rejected the Messiah and the gospel, who much greater blessing is going to result for the Gentiles when Israel embraces

the gospel? Their rejection of the gospel brought blessing to the whole Gentile world. Their acceptance, Paul says, is going to do even more. In other words, Paul is saying that God's works of grace in the present and future are going to be greater than His works of grace in the past.

That is a very, very important thing for us to learn. We often have a idea that the greatest things were done in the past. These Gentiles, for instance for whom Paul was speaking could have said, "You know, the greatest thing that God has done in the history of the world in terms of the scope of His work is to send the gospel to the nations. Isn't it amazing that all these Gentile, all these non-Hebrew speakers are out there worshipping the Messiah of Israel." And the Gentiles could have thought that is the greatest thing that God has ever done. He's never going to do anything greater than that. The Apostle Paul is saying, "You've seen nothing yet." God's grace is going to eclipse, in the future, even the glories of the past and we easily slip into that.

Those of us who love the doctrines of grace in the Reformed faith, we fondly look back to the Great Awakening and we think, oh if it can only be like that. It will never be like that again. We look back to the days of Knox and Calvin and we say, "Oh it will never be that good again," and the Apostle Paul is saying, God's works of grace in the future are going to eclipse what He has done in the past.

There is literature that we read that sort of reinforces to us the idea that the great days were always in the past. I'm a great fan of J.R Tolkien, and I'm waiting like many of you for the *Lord of The Rings* to come to the movie theaters, but I'm sure I'm going to be disappointed because the book is so good. In that book, isn't it interesting that the greatest of the heroes are always the hero's past. You go through the book thinking Saruman, he's pretty powerful, but then you find out he's sort of small potatoes in the whole scheme of things when you find out who the evil people were behind him. The same way you find out, you think these heroes are great heroes and then you find out about the Valinor and all these other people in the past and they're greater and you have this idea that history is sort of winding down and it's never going to be as good as it was in the past.

You know my father sort of held that belief about baseball. I could be bragging to him about the current Atlanta Braves or the St. Louis Cardinals and he was always a Yankee fan. You have to understand he was from Union County, South Carolina and he taught me there was only one kind of Yankee you could like, a New York Yankee, he said. He had these exalted memories of the Yankees of his youth. So I would be bragging, for instance, about how good the pitching staff batted for a particular baseball team. He would say, "Oh son that's nothing. I remember the days when the Yankee batters all batted three hundred." Now, look, I went back and looked at the records. I never found a Yankee pitching staff that batted three hundred, but my father thought that over the years they had become larger than life and it was better back then. The Apostle Paul is saying to these Gentiles, "It is amazing what God has done in bringing the Gentiles in, but

you've seen nothing yet." God is going to do something in the future even greater and it is going to entail, not only blessing for Israel, but it's going to entail blessing for you.

Isn't it interesting how Paul sets forth a salvation in which the salvation of the Gentile itself is for the benefit of the Jew, and the salvation of the Jew is for the benefit of the Gentile. They can still be distinguished, but God's plan of redemption is designed to work for their mutual betterment so that the Jew is for the Gentile and the Gentile for the Jew.

Now my friends, there are many practical applications to this passage, but one of them is absolutely crystal clear, and that is that this passage ought to move Christians to a practical love of the Jewish people and a longing for their salvation. This passage does not teach us that we have to take a particular stance with regard to the modern nation state of Israel, but it certainly says that the Christian must have in his or her heart a longing to see the salvation of God come to the people of Israel. Now that's very important, because over the course of Christians history many horrible things have been done to the Jewish people by erstwhile Christians under the pretence of following Christian teaching, and the Apostle Paul, had he been listened to here in Romans chapter 11, would have forestalled those things. Because he is saying to these Gentile Christians, "I don't care whether the Jewish people are part of Nero's plan against you right now. You ought to love them for the sake of Christ because their salvation will be for your benefit as well and your salvation in the plan of God is for their benefit." So he's teaching them to have a heart for these people even though they may be against them. So, this passage is designed to move us to a practical love of the Jewish people.

Now let me just stop right there and say, I understand that is not going to win us friends in the Jewish community today. The Jewish community is very, very concerned about conversion and they find it offensive that Christians attempt to share with them the gospel and ask them to trust in Jesus Christ. It's to turn their back on their heritage, their culture, their religion, and I understand that evokes a negative response. But do you understand that from Paul's perspective, the greatest act of anti-Semitism that you can commit against a Jewish person, or against the Jewish people as a whole, is to refuse to share the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ with them and to refuse to pray that they might enter into the same benefits that you enjoy yourself. Paul is teaching us to have a heart of love for the Jewish people and that includes a longing to see them converted. That's very difficult, and I understand in our day and age it must be done with great sensitivity, but Paul is teaching us to have a heart for the Jewish people.

Secondly, I simply want to say by way of practical application, that Paul is teaching us here in verses 12, 15 and 16, that God has designed the salvation of all His people in such a way that the salvation of each serves the interest of the other. In this passage, and we're going to look at it in just a few moments, in this

passage Paul says, this is how the plan of God works: The Jewish people reject the Messiah, this is God's purpose that results in the conversion of the Gentiles, which in turn results in a blessing to Israel, which in turn results in a blessing to the Gentiles.

Isn't that interesting? The rejection of the Messiah by Israel, results in the conversion of the Gentiles, the conversion of the Gentiles results in a blessing for Israel, and the blessing of Israel in turn results in a blessing for the Gentiles. It's this divine conspiracy in which the blessing for one redounds to the benefit of the other, and isn't that the way it ought to be? Isn't that the way our salvation is? Your salvation belongs to me, it encourages me, it strengthens me, I benefit from it.

I've had the privilege listening recently to testimonies given during wedding rehearsal dinners, where both children who are being married are believing and they love the Lord and they love His word, and to hear their friends testify of the grace of God in their lives is one of the soul enlivening things that I can possibly conceive of. It strengthens my faith, it gets me excited again. I remember how I felt in the first flush of my discovery of those truths. They are mature for their age and it redounds to my benefit. I grow and I'm strengthened in my faith. Well, our salvations are designed by God to accrue to the benefit of one another. That's the way we ought to be thinking. We ought to be thinking about what God has given to us in our experience and how it can be a blessing to our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Those are just a couple of ways in which the truth that Paul speaks applies to us today.

III. Our proper attitude to the Jewish people.

Now, one last thing, if you look at verse 13 and 14. Paul here identifies himself as the apostle to the Gentiles, but then he says, I want you to understand that I have an emphatically pro Jewish ministry. You see, there would have been some in Paul's own race who would have seen him as a traitor, as a turncoat.

I remember the first time that I heard Mitch Glazer, who was one of the chief evangelists for 'Jews for Jesus' speaking in a chapel, and he said, "When I became a Christian, my parents rejected me. They refused to acknowledge that I existed. They don't correspond with me, they don't speak with me, but my grandmother, my grandmother still loves me and she'll speak to me." Grandmothers have that amazing ability to do that. No matter what's going on. He was talking with his grandmother and he said, "Grandmother, I don't understand this. Dad doesn't even believe in God, dad's an atheist, he's Jewish ethnically, but he's an atheist. He doesn't believe in the Torah, he doesn't believe in the writings, he doesn't believe in the prophecies, he doesn't believe in the prophets, I believe in all those things. I believe in God, I believe in the Torah, I believe in the writings, I believe in the prophets, it's just in addition to that I believe in Jesus Christ. I believe that He fulfills all those things. Which one of us

is the better Jew? Me or Dad?" And she immediately said, "Oh, your dad, because he doesn't believe in Jesus Christ."

I know that there would have been many Jews in Paul's day who would have seen him as turning his back on the truth because of his embrace of Jesus Christ, but Paul saw his ministry to the Gentiles as a way to bless Israel. In verses 13 and 14 he's saying, "Look, here is how I think of my ministry to the Gentiles, you Gentile Christians in Rome, and this is how I want you to think about your ministry to the Jews." He says, "If I seek to move my fellow country man to jealousy and to save some of them, I am magnifying my ministry to the Gentiles." In other words, there is no conflict of interest. When I try to move Gentiles to trust in God, I'm not doing that to the exclusion of the salvation of my own fellow countryman. In fact, in God's plan, the blessing of salvation of the Gentiles is designed to bring Israel to saving faith. And so, he says, there is no conflict of interest. Every time I witness to a Gentile, I'm praying God will bring in my fellow countryman, and he's saying, you Gentile Christians in Rome, you ought to be thinking the same way.

My friends, he's saying to you today, "You ought to be thinking the same way." He's saying that we ought to have a longing for the salvation for the Jewish people. He's saying here, and he uses the shocking phrase, *jealousy*, that we ought to have a desire that Israel will see the blessings of Abraham coming to the Gentiles. And then that Israel will say, you know, God promised those blessings to us long ago and we ought to be enjoying those blessings ourselves. He's not saying we're to provoke them to jealousy in some sort of crass way. Envy is not the instrument of grace, faith is. He is saying this, our experience of the grace and the promises of God ought to be an evident display to His ancient people so that they desire to embrace Him too. May God bless His word. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we long to see the whole number of Your people throughout the ages, throughout the span of this world, brought into the fellowship of union and communion with Christ. Grant that we would have hearts large with this desire and be found well pleasing in your sight. In Jesus name. Amen.

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