

Romans: All Israel Will Be Saved

Romans 11:23-27

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 11, the 23 verse. We'll actually begin reading in the 22 verse in order to catch a thought mid phrase from the apostle. We're continuing to work our way through this great gospel of Romans. We've been looking at Romans 11 for a number of weeks, and Romans 11: 23 through 27 is the culminating point of Paul's argument in this chapter to this point that when we get to Romans 11: 28 he slightly changes the subject. It's a related subject, but he's slightly refocusing our attention by the time we get there. He's reiterating some things for us in this passage that he's been telling us all along.

Of course we have indicated that Paul's discussion here in Romans 9 through 11 is designed, in part, to explain how the church is to view Israel and how Gentile Christians are to relate to Israel and think about present day Israel. It was a very practical thing for Paul to raise this issue with this Roman Christian congregation. That congregation would have had Jewish Christians in it to be sure but it was apparently dominated by Gentile Christians and further more it was in a cultural context where Israel would have been somewhat despised and condescended to. These Gentile Roman Christians may well have been infected by the general Roman snobbery towards Israel. The Romans didn't think much of Israel. They looked down on Israel. Josephus perhaps wrote his books precisely trying to get the Romans to think more highly of Israel and its history and its culture. What ever the case is, Paul seems to understand that these Roman Gentile Christians had adopted some sort of an attitude towards the Jewish people that was inappropriate and he writes in part to correct that.

Furthermore, these Gentile Christians would have been well aware of the wide spread unbelief of Israel in the gospel preached by the Apostle Paul, and that may have been impacting the attitude of those Gentile Christians towards Israel and towards Jewish evangelism. Their response might have been, "Well, look Paul, most of the Jewish people we talk to are rejecting this gospel that you are proclaiming and that we are proclaiming too. Yes, we have Jewish Christians, friends in the congregation, but most of their relations, most of their friends, most of the Jews that we know don't believe this Paul, and their attitude may be, 'Why

bother?' The Gentiles, Paul, are accepting this gospel everywhere we turn. We're being more effective, you're getting more bang for your buck and mission dollars by going to the Gentiles. These Jews, boy, they are a hard sell."

Then there is another problem. That is, before the Romans began to persecute the Christians, Israel had begun to persecute the Christians. These Gentile Christians might well be saying to Paul, "Look Paul, these are the first people who turned against us. They are enemies of the gospel, they are enemies of the church, how can you ask us to go to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. That doesn't make sense Paul?" So for those reasons and no doubt more, Paul is spending a lot of time in addressing this issue.

Of course, Paul's wisdom, his divinely inspired wisdom, has been born out in age after age because it would not be too long before the Christian church, dominated as it was by a Gentile outlook, would eventually look wholly negatively against the Jews. They would blame them for everything that had gone wrong in the days of the New Testament and even participate in a tax upon the Jewish people. Paul's words were very timely for this congregation.

Perhaps you're asking yourself today, that's fine and good for a Roman Gentile Christian congregation in the city of Rome around the time of the Apostle Paul, but what about me? This just doesn't speak to the situation that I'm in today. Oh, yes it does. Let's see how as we turn to Paul's word, God's words, in Romans 11. We'll begin in verse 22.

Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." "AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." Amen. Thus ends this reading with God's holy and inspired word. May He write it's eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, these words contain mind-boggling truths. They humble us, but You mean to do more than humble us by boggling our minds through things that we find it hard to comprehend. You intend us, by Your Holy Spirit, to comprehend truth, which changes our lives. Help that to be the reality today as we study Your word. In Jesus name. Amen.

Those of you who are students of the Bible will know that these verses are the occasion of much debate and discussion and disagreement in the Christian church. More than one phrase in this passage has provoked rigorous analysis. The phrase for instance, *all Israel will be saved*, what does it mean? There are some that believe that phrase means that one day the nation of Israel itself will be re-instituted and every member thereof will be a believer in God through Jesus Christ. Others believe that that phrase, *all Israel will be saved*, refers to a future generation when before the end, God will bring a tremendous influx of the Jewish people into His kingdom believing in Jesus Christ. And it will be, as it were, life from the dead, from the church that will be floundering under persecution and will gain new light from this influx of Jewish believers and Jewish participation in the kingdom of God. Others believe that this verse simply states that God will continue to deal with the people of Israel generation after generation and that once we have gotten to the end of time we will look back and we will see this great cumulative work that God has done amongst 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 and that 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, all these professors, all these great commentators on Scripture over the generations can't figure this out, well how can you expect me to figure this out? And if you can't expect me to figure this out, how can I get anything of practical use out of this passage?"

I want to say that despite what things we may continue to scratch our heads about, there is a core of teaching in these verses which is crystal clear and which is practical as the day is long. And I'd like to point you to two particular aspects of it today as we look first at verses 23 and 24, and then at verses 25 through 27.

As we said, Paul is summarizing his grand argument in Romans chapter 11: 23 through 27, and he is making it clear, especially here in verses 23 and 24, 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, it is so mind boggling, that no one could have come up with this on their own. They couldn't have seen it ahead of time, they couldn't have figured it out, had not God revealed it to us in His word. And in teaching us that, Paul has in mind several important lessons.

I. All Jewish people who embrace Christ by faith will be brought into the kingdom.

First, let's look at verses 23 and 24. 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 into their own olive tree. His argument is this, "Look Gentile Christians, if God can do this amazing, this mind boggling thing and bring you into the kingdom, well don't think that it's beyond God to bring His own ancient people back into His own kingdom, their own kingdom." Paul is asserting here 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 Israel here and he is speaking unequivocally about God's ability to save.

But as he does so, he does not downplay the necessity of faith. I want you to see both of those things in this passage. Look at verse 23, "They will be grafted in for God is able to graft them in again." Paul is emphasizing the sovereignty of God. It seems that there is some Gentile Christian saying, "Look, we can't get very many of the Jewish people at all to embrace the gospel, Paul. Perhaps God's done with them, perhaps they are just too hard, perhaps we need to focus our attention somewhere else." The Apostle Paul 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 to us today. There can be few in this room who love the Lord Jesus Christ who do not have near relatives that do not love the Lord Jesus Christ and worship Him and trust in Him. There can be few in this room that do not have friends and colleagues for whom we have a deep love and loyalty and commitment, but who do not share our common love and trust for salvation in Jesus Christ, and some of them are very hard 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 sometimes and we wonder if God can save them. The Apostle 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 a case for Him."

God is sovereign and what a tremendous encouragement that is to you. Maybe you've been praying for years like Monica prayed for Augustin, 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 to the expense of the requirement of faith. Look at what he says again in verse 13, "They also, if they do not continue in their unbelief will be grafted in." You see, the Apostle 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 other way 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."

Now, the Apostle Paul always emphasizes God's sovereignty and our

responsibility side by side without compromising either. Let me put that another way. The Apostle Paul always emphasizes God's sovereignty, but not at the expense of our responsibility. Let me put it yet another way. Paul emphasizes the sovereignty 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 things he sees as simultaneous truths, neither to be demeaned or de-emphasized. So he holds both sovereignty and responsibility together.

So often those of us who believe in the doctrines of grace as we sometimes call them, or in the Reformed faith, or in the sovereignty of God, have friends who say to us, "You know, what you believe is something like this. 'God has chosen some; He's passed over others. Those whom He has chosen, whether they believe or not, will be saved. Those whom He has passed over, whether they believe or not, will be lost so that there are people in Heaven who do not believe and there are people who would, but God won't let them.'" The Apostle Paul is saying to them, "That is the most gross distortion of what I've been teaching in the book of Romans." He's saying, "No, God is sovereign and we are responsible. There is no one that God has chosen who does not believe and there is no one who believes whom God has not chosen. Both of those truths are true. Neither can be compromised, both are essential." And so Paul speaks of God's grace in such a way as not to de-emphasize the necessity of our faith. Faith is the means of salvation.

Again, if you look at verse 24 Paul goes on to argue to these Gentile Christians who are saying, "Boy, Paul, this looks like an uphill battle in witnessing to the ancient people of God because they're hard to the gospel." And the apostle basically says this, "It will be easier for God to re-graft the Jewish people into their own olive tree than it was to bring the Gentiles and to en-graft them into the cultivated olive tree from which they did not spring." He's saying, "If God can bring the Gentiles in, well, it's going to be a piece of cake for Him to bring the Jewish people in."

You see again that Paul's illustration makes it clear that the church is one. God's plan is not to have two peoples, two destinies, two ways to salvation, but one people, one body, one church, one way of salvation, one common destiny. The illustration of the olive tree we've already seen emphasizes that. God hasn't planted two trees; He's planted one. When He saves us, He en-grafts us into the one tree. Our *Confession of Faith* beautifully emphasizes this. If you've got your hymnal, pull it out and turn to page 863, and look sort of toward the bottom. It's in the *Confession's* chapter on the church, chapter 25 section 1, and listen to what the *Confession* says, "The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof, and is the spouse and body and fullness of Him that fill us all and all." In other words, the *Confession* is saying that the people of God, the Church, consist of all of God's people in all

generations, both those who have gone before, those who are a part of it now, those who will be a part of it in the future, and we're all brought into one spiritual body, the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul emphasizes that again here. He's emphasizing the spiritual unity of the people of God,

And so here in verses 23 and 24, in this mystifying, mind-boggling section, Paul's already given you three very practical and very understandable truths. First, God is sovereign in salvation and we are responsible to believe. Second, faith is the way of salvation and God's sovereignty is not an argument against the responsibility that we have to believe. Thirdly, when God saves us, He brings us into one family, one body, one temple, one vine, one tree, one church. That's His plan. To bring about spiritual unity. So, there is Paul's first practical point found in verses 23 and 24. Let's move to the harder part now, verses 25 through 27.

II. God will keep His promises to Israel.

Again Paul's teaching here in outline is very clear. He says that the plan of God for His church and the future place of Israel could not have been gleamed from our common sense. We wouldn't have picked this up from general revelation. We'd never have been able to figure this out on our own. It is, he says, a mystery. That is, a truth dependent upon the explanation of God. Therefore, in this passage, Paul will assert that God is not done with the Jewish people, that God will keep His promises, and that Gentiles should be humbled.

Look with me at verse 25. In verse 25 alone the Apostle Paul does four things. Look at it very closely. First of all, he tells his Gentile brethren that he does not want them to be uninformed about the things that he's going to talk about. It's as if the Apostle Paul clears his throat and says, "Uh hum, I don't want you not to know about this." I'm so thankful he did that, because Gentile Christians today might be very tempted to say, "You know, this is very confusing and I don't really need to know about this." Here is Paul at the very outset saying, "Oh yes you do. You do need to know about this, I don't want you not to be uninformed about what I'm going to speak about." That's the first thing that he does.

Then secondly, he tells them why he doesn't want them to be uninformed about it. That is because this truth, he says, impacts your humility. What's the phrase he uses? *So that you will not be wise in your own estimation.* You see, some of these Gentile Christians were wise in their own estimation with regard to what God was doing with the Jews. The apostle says, don't allow your present view and the response of present Israel to you right now to alter your view of the importance of Jewish evangelism. To alter your understanding of the ingathering of both Jew and Gentile into my one body. Don't be arrogant. This truth humbles you to see that God has a plan for both Gentile and Jew. That's the second thing that he says.

Thirdly he 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 Agatha Christie novel. Mystery doesn't mean a really exciting 'Who done It?' that you figure out at the end and you have to have all sorts of secret clues. Paul is also not talking about a mystery in the way that mystery religions talk about mysteries. Mystery religions are religions that say, "All of you unwashed, uninitiated don't understand the secrets of us super spiritual types, but if you go through all thirty degrees, you'll eventually get to the point where you're let in on the real secrets of the club." That's not what Paul means by a mystery either.

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 in ourselves 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's something for everybody to understand, and it's something that every Christian minister is to make proclamation of in His preaching.

So, Paul says, the plan of God with regard to the Gentiles and Jews is a mystery. You couldn't have understood this unless God had explained it to you.

Finally he says, that what God has done with Israel in their rejection of the Messiah has reference to His work of salvation amongst the Gentiles, but does not mean that God is finished with Israel. He's emphasized this twice before in the passage. Look at verse 12 and verse 15 and look at the end of verse 25 and the beginning of verse 26 and you will find that each of those phrases are parallel. In verse 12 God says, "If their transgression, if the Jews transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be?" The embrace of the gospel by the Jewish people will be a blessing for the world, He says. Verse 15, "If their rejection be the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" The embrace of the gospel by the Jewish people will be a blessing for the Gentile church. Verse 25b, "A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and thus all Israel will be saved." The hardening of Israel has become a blessing for the Gentiles and led to the fullness of the Gentiles, but not to God's being finished with Israel.

You see, over and over Paul is stating what he says is the order of God's strategy: The Jews reject the Messiah, the Gentiles embrace Him, so that the Jews embrace Him in order that unparalleled benefit comes to the Gentiles within the Church and the Jews and the Gentiles dwell there together in faith in Christ. So, Paul's point is again that the wide spread embrace of the gospel by the Gentiles doesn't mean that God no longer has a plan for His ancient people. The quote from the Old Testament found there in verses 26 and 27 is designed to buttress our hope in Israel's salvation. It refers to God's promise; "The deliverer will come from Zion." The deliverer there is Jesus Christ; He will remove

ungodliness from Jacob. He has an agenda to redeem His ancient people. This is My covenant with them. When I take away their sins through the covenant of grace they will experience the forgiveness of sins. Now, this is Paul's great message. That God is not just finished with the ancient people with His people Israel.

Now, you may ask me, "Well, how's that going to work out?" Friends, I have some suspicions and I'm not going to share them with you today. We've already indicated there are many different views of how that's going to happen, but the fundamental point is very clear. God's goodness is mind boggling. He keeps His promises beyond our wildest dreams. So, we who have been brought into the kingdom as Gentiles by grace must not suspect that He does not have the power to save His ancient people. And indeed we ought to have a love for the Jewish people and belief that He is doing something yet among His ancient people. Did you know that in the twentieth century more Jews became Christians than in the previous nineteen centuries?

Now, I have no idea of the eschatological significance of that, but I do know that the Apostle Paul would want me to praise the Lord, and that he would want me then to grow in my love for the ancient people and to grow in my determination to bear witness to them in Jesus Christ. You see, the Apostle Paul is cultivating here an attitude amongst Gentile Christians so that they will practically acknowledge God's bringing down a division between His ancient people in Jesus Christ. Because my friends, if we can be united through Jesus Christ as Jew and Gentile, there is no other barrier in the world that can not be transcended in the Church. And that is God's goal for His people in the gospel, that in our embrace of the gospel and in our communion of Jesus Christ, we would be one and we would reflect that oneness to the world. That is a prayer for Christians in the twenty- first century, and one of the most practical prayers we could ever lift up. Let's do so in faith, let's go to the Lord now in prayer.

Our Lord and our God, we do pray as our brother has already prayed that You would bring in Your ancient people and that You would glorify Yourself in them and in us and that our spiritual unity in Jesus Christ would be a bright beckon of witness to a world in need of the gospel. This we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

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