

Romans 11:25-36

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] Our scripture reading comes from the book of Romans, chapter 11, verses 25 through 36. This can be found on page 922 in the few Bibles in front of you.

Please stand for the reading of God's word. Romans 11, 25 through 36. 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. 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. And this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins. 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. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were at one time disobedient to God, but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you, they also may now receive mercy.

[1 : 20] For God has consigned all to disobedience, but he may have mercy on all. O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable are his judgments, and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor, or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. And this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Please be seated. Well, one of the sad ironies of life is how quickly each one of us can begin to think that we are at the center of things.

Worse yet, that we stand above other people. That we would imagine that we are bread that rises higher than the common loaf.

[2 : 38] It's a disease that's universal. Certainly been sitting on top of me this particular week, and with this particular text.

In the end, of course, our temptation toward big-headedness is always the result of being small-minded.

The very word pride is translated in the Scriptures as that which is, by nature, puffed up, out of proportion.

The proud one is the one who has lost perspective. The arrogant one is the one who is out of accord.

Especially difficult when this enters into the church. Of course, it's embedded in the fabric of all relationships, isn't it? Think of anything that's going wrong in your relationships, and this battle of conceitedness somehow is in play.

[4 : 08] The husband, who's fed up with a wife's response, or vice versa. A child who doesn't think their parents get it.

A neighbor in your association that you are well aware doesn't rise to your standard of care.

Yes, one of the sad ironies of life is how quickly we can all begin to think that we are at the center of things, that we stand above other people, that we are a loaf of bread that rises above the common loaf.

You ever find yourself saying something like, Boy, I'm sure glad I don't have to live their lives for them. I find myself saying that on occasion. You ever find yourself saying, They just don't get it. Imagine when you throw race or ethnicity into the mix of our big-headedness. Did she say that because I am black?

[5 : 33] Or was it just something relational in play? Why is it that those two are united on this question and they happen to share the same ethnicity?

Is it the issue or is it the ethnic solidarity that I'm running into? In Rome, the church consisted of a mixture of peoples, both socioeconomically and racially, and generally constructed.

There were factions within Jewish members of the faith and Gentile members of the faith. And Paul had had it out earlier in the letter, hadn't he, with any Jew in the congregation who had been succumbing to conceitedness or arrogance or pride.

He'd laid it all out to them, taken them down entirely. But now, it's the Gentiles' turn. Take a look at the opening verse.

Lest you become wise in your own conceit. Literally, it's this interesting play on a double negative. I do not wish that you would not know lest, of course, you become wise in your own arrogance.

[7 : 07] Look at what we had last week. Do you see it back there in verse 14? I'm sorry, verse 18. Do not be arrogant toward the branches.

He's speaking, of course, in verse 13, to the Gentiles. And in verse 20, he finishes, so do not become proud. For the temptation at this point in the letter was for the Gentile Christian to think that they had become the center of things.

And so he says, lest you be wise in your own conceits. I want you to know the mystery. And the mystery is this, verse 25 to 32, mercy for all, and that means Israel at the end.

don't forget this, there is mercy for all, and that means Israel at the end. Verse 33 to 36, then, it is the, it is the fact of this in Paul's mind that enables the anguish of soul with which he started in chapter 9, lest I would even be willing to be accursed if my kinsmen would come to know.

The anguish of soul finally gives way to adoration and praise. Why? Because mercy for all and that for Israel at the end.

[8 : 43] A conceitedness of soul, a pride and arrogance that fails to remember that in God's great and glorious gospel, there is mercy for all and all Israel at the end.

And this, of course, is a word for the church to know. Interestingly, it is a mystery. Look at there, verse 25. I want you to understand this mystery.

Well, the mystery, what it is, is simple. He lays it out in three clauses. We know what the mystery is, brothers, that a, one, a partial hardening has come upon Israel, two, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, three, and in this way all Israel will be saved.

That's the mystery. that what we've been reading about in regard to the rejection of ethnic Israel to the great and glorious gospel of Christ and their disobedience by their lack of faith and trust and reliance in Him is one, partial, that is, not total, two, temporary.

Notice the markers, until, or now, that run through our text. And three, there will be a future turning. In this way all Israel will be saved.

[10 : 28] That's the great and glorious gospel that levels any pride that would rise within one here today.

So Paul began in chapter 9 by defending God's word in the face of Israel's presumption to access, closes chapter 11 by proclaiming Israel's future acceptance of the gospel as a result of the promises found in God's word.

That's the argument. I will defend God's word, says Paul, against your presumption as being God's people. But the end of the argument is, there is a future promise for God's people as a consequence of the promises in God's word.

Mercy for all, and for Israel at the end. How do I understand this? I want to take a look at this. This is one of the more debated texts in the letter, and so we ought to at least take a look at a couple of the complexities in it.

The word Israel is generally understood in one of two ways. First, there are those who would like to think that this is referring to spiritual Israel, and they have good reason for their thought.

[12 : 00] That is, back in chapter 9, in verse 6, we see this governing principle according to this view, which says, but it is not as though the word of God has failed, for not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring.

And with that kind of verse there, in the recent history of the letter, there are those who would argue that the Israel of verse 26 in our text is a reference not to ethnic Israel, but to spiritual Israel.

Further, they would turn us back all the way to chapter 2, and these are texts that you ought to wrestle with. Verses 27 through 29, then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. For a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the spirit, not by the letter. Third, they would point us to the fact that when we got to chapter 4 and we saw Abraham as the father of all the faithful, not merely ethnic descent.

[13:21] Fifth, they could argue that the entire scope of the letter to this point has been to take out any distinction. There are no distinctions. Therefore, when he says in verse 26, all Israel will be saved, the thought is that this refers to everyone who God would save, both Jew and Gentile.

It's spiritual Israel. That's one way to view it. There's another view that we ought to think about, questions you need to ask, and that is, what is Israel in verse 25?

I mean, this is the nearest, most approximate use of the term. And in verse 25 of our text, Israel is obviously ethnic Israel. What's the whole nature of the discussion here?

He's speaking to Gentiles in regard to what God will be doing with Israel. Third, the quote itself from Isaiah 59 is a quotation that is for Israel.

Israel. Then look at the text itself. Israel is used in verse 1 of our text, where Paul says, I myself am an Israelite.

[14:34] It's obviously ethnic. The same thing in verse 7. What then Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking? Ethnic. This is a notion in our entire chapter of what God is going to do in re-grafting ethnic Israel to his great and glorious gospel.

Look at chapter 11 verses 11 and 12. 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.

Now, if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean? This hint of what he is going to do in their inclusion.

We see the same type of language in verses 14 and 15. In order that somehow I might make fellow Jews jealous and thus save some of them.

For if their rejection, that is present Israel, means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?

[15:49] Or, look down at verse 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.

So which is it? Well, the commentators will argue through the centuries, and will probably argue in this midst, but those are the texts you have to deal with. And I don't think he's trying to be ambiguous here, I think he actually is trying to refer to either spiritual Israel or ethnic Israel.

Today, I think he refers to ethnic Israel, that God has mercy for all, and that means Israel, ethnic Jews, at the close of the age, at the parousia.

Well, what would that mean? Well, for that, we have to take a look at what this word all means. I mean, this complicates it, doesn't it? He says in verse 26, in this way, all Israel will be saved.

Now, there are a variety of ways that this has been taken into meaning. First, it could mean that every Israelite throughout all time is going to, in the end, be saved.

[17:13] all Israel. Everyone. Now, of course, you have to take into text, you have to take into consideration other texts, where he's already indicated that not all Israel is Israel.

You have to take into consideration texts in chapter two that speak about at the close of the age, there will be judgment for both the Jew and the Gentile, and the rewards will be given, and there's this separation that not everyone will receive blessing in the life to come.

But nevertheless, there are those who would look at this and argue for a universalistic understanding that at the end of the day, God treats Israel different than everybody else, and they will all be saved, each and every one.

Another view, of course, is that it means each one who will be alive at the coming of Christ, that when Christ comes, or just before he comes, there will be a movement in the world where the Jews, which traditionally, historically, and now through the millennia, have been rejecting this gospel, will in mass, in total, accept him.

That could very well be true. But it doesn't necessarily mean every Israelite throughout all time. It doesn't even necessarily have to mean each Israelite at the time of the second coming, and just before that they will be open to the gospel message.

[18:42] It could mean simply the elect of Israel, all, that is the full number, the final number, that God's mysterious plan of salvation has been this, to make promises to Israel through Abraham and

through him to bring a Savior into the world.

And then for a season now, from the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, to find that message being rejected, almost universally by Jews, whereas Gentiles are streaming in and coming to faith in Christ.

But at the close of the age, when he returns, just prior to that, we would expect a great, great harvest of Jews coming to faith in Christ, not being saved by any other way than the gospel, but nevertheless coming to fully embrace the gospel.

And thus my card, and the great distance between my heart for these men and Paul's for his own people.

Do we have the heart of God? The only thing that moves Paul from the anguish of soul that sees his countrymen dying without embracing the gospel is the promise, according to his understanding of scripture, that it will move to their full inclusion before the close of age.

[20 : 35] He seems to ground his belief, verse 26, in a quotation from Isaiah 59, where we see the deliverer will come.

He has it in the future tense here, from Zion, and what will he do? When the deliverer comes to Israel, he will banish all ungodliness from Jacob, and this will be my covenant with them, he will take away their sins.

He roots his grounding of hope for Jews to embrace the gospel in the promises of Isaiah 59.

And then his confidence swells in verses 28 to 32 on three ideas. First, the electing nature of God, the irrevocable calling of God, and the eternal mercy of God.

Look what he says, as regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. That is, passively, they are enemies of God. They're not actively his enemies, but they are passively God's enemies.

[21 : 48] But as regards to election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. that Paul says that God elected Israel above all the earth, not because they were brighter or smarter or greater in number, but strictly out of his sovereign mercy.

And he will fulfill his plan for them. Indeed, he says, for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. God is doing something.

That doesn't mean necessarily geopolitically, but salvifically, he is doing something and will do something before the close of the age for those to whom the promises were initially given.

And then he says, it all is a consequence of his great mercy. Take a look at this, 30 to 32. Just as you were at one time disobedient to God, but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by mercy shown to you, they also may now receive mercy for God has consigned all to disobedience that he might have mercy on all.

And so it is. This is the truth of the great and glorious gospel according to Paul. He calls it a mystery. What is the mystery?

[23 : 12] That you and I live in an age, as did he, when the gospel message which had been promised to ethnic Israel is largely rejected in the personal work of Christ. And that day will go forward until the full inclusion of the Gentiles comes in.

And at that point, when the full inclusion of the Gentiles has come in, God will irrevocably complete his promise to Israel and there will be a full and final and complete number in which Israel itself is saved right before the coming of the end.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. That's what I believe this text is teaching. So where is my heart for the promises of God?

Where is yours? It means that small-mindedness goes. It means that big-headed swelling-ness of somehow beginning to think you're at the center of what God is doing in the world all falls.

It means that pride, which is by nature a puffing up of that which ought to be smaller, should be reduced. It means that arrogance is always out of accord.

[24 : 41] It means that when God has a great and glorious gospel for all, it will mean Israel at the end. Look at what happens to Paul at this point.

Verse 33 to the end. He shifts. The great anguish of Paul gives way to adoration and praise.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments, how inscrutable his ways, for who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor, or who has given a gift to him, that he might be repaid for from him and through him and

to him, for all things to him be the glory forever.

Amen. Let me see if I could put this together for you. There's a time when you stop asking questions of the biblical text.

This is one of those times for Paul. There's a time when you read the Bible and you know you don't understand it all, and you stop, and you sit under it to the best of your ability, and you receive it to the best of which you think you understand it.

[26 : 13] That is the sign that we want everyone in our church to live under. word. How unsearchable are his judgments.

You can't search it out anymore. So the mark of a believer in our congregation, whether you hold a PhD and understand the sophistication of all biblical texts, the complexities, the apparent inconsistencies, the questionings that will never end in your mind, there is a moment where you say, how unsearchable are his judgments, where you put yourself under this word. That's the mark of humility. That's the mark of receptivity. That's the mark of what we call belief or faith. disobedience.

This is in contrast to what the text talks about in regard to disobedience. Remember the beginning of Romans? What was it? Paul's gospel was to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles.

And back then we asked, what does this mean, the obedience of faith? Does this mean the obeying of life that is the consequence of faith? Or is faith itself the obedience he is after?

[27 : 48] And we didn't know. But two weeks ago we read from Romans 10 and verse 16 and we saw but they have not all obeyed the gospel for Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed?

And there we had our answer. That obedience is belief. So in our text, disobedience to God is a lack of belief and faith and reliance and trust upon his great and glorious gospel which is fulfilled in the person and work of Christ in which we have a righteousness from God apart from the law manifest in the world through his death, resurrection by which God is both the just and the justifier of whomever he pleases and Israel at the end.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments, how inscrutable his ways.

Do you see the way these things are traveling in the text? The wealth of God is traveling with the wisdom of God. the wealth of God is these riches that are bestowed out upon all people just as we saw in chapter 11 and verse 12, their failure meant riches for the Gentiles.

What riches? Salvation! Relationship with God! Freedom from the wrath at the very end! Entrance into his heavenly kingdom!

[29 : 33] Standing before the great tribunal on that day and receiving mercy! Those kind of riches! And his riches are limitless!

And his wisdom is inexhaustible! How unsearchable is that kind of wisdom? How inscrutable is that kind of dispensing of wealth?

And so those two ideas travel even in the text that he picks up in 34 and 35 where he says in these two questions, first one concerning his wisdom and second one concerning his wealth, for who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor?

It's a question on wisdom. Secondly, or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? A question regarding his great wealth displayed upon all of humanity, for indeed he consigned all to disobedience, a lack of faith, a rebellion against God, that he might have mercy on all, and Israel at the end.

And so too he closes with this moment of doxology which is beyond any of our ability to fully understand, but it speaks of God as the source of all things, as the sustainer of all things, as the goal of all things.

[30 : 56] Not you, not me, we're not in the middle, never have been, never will be, for from him, he's the source of all things. Through him come all things.

To him are going all things, and therein our small-mindedness must give way. We must welcome one another, whether it be into your marriage, into the relationship with children, whether it be in relationship to our ethnicity and our differences, whether it be in regard to our socioeconomic distinctions, there is no place, according to the gospel of Paul, no place for conceitedness, arrogance, or pride.

we are all undone, because he has had mercy on all. Therefore, I appeal to you, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

God, go forth this week with a mind that is ever enlarging the great and glorious gospel.

And your marriage will be better, your relationship with your children will be better, the relationship with your boss will be better. because you'll be living more humbly as we ought.

[33 : 00] So much more to say. Thus far, God's word. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, this strong text at the conclusion of this great argument in Paul's gospel.

And I pray, Lord, that we would receive it to the best of our ability and to celebrate it in the way that we live with one another.

In Christ's name, amen.