

Romans 11:1-24: The Triumph of God's Mercy

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Preacher: Arthur Jackson

[0 : 00] Romans chapter 11, verses 1 through 24. I ask then, has God rejected his people?

By no means, for I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah? How he appeals to God against Israel.

Lord, they have killed your prophets. They have demolished your altars, and I alone am left. And they seek my life. But what is God's reply to him?

I have kept for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. So, too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

[1 : 04] But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works. Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace.

What then? Israel has failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened. David says, David says, Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block, and a retribution for them.

Let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see and bend their backs forever. 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?

Now, I'm speaking to you, Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous and thus save some of them.

[2 : 32] For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump.

And if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off in you, although a wild olive shoot were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches.

If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.

That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear.

For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God, severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in this kindness.

[3 : 46] Otherwise, you too will be cut off. 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.

For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree?

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, God. You may be seated. We're in these great chapters these days, Romans 9 through 11, and trust that your understanding continues to be enhanced as we go through the book of Romans in general in these chapters in particular.

Have you noticed that the nation of Israel has been in the news of late? On May 20th, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with President Barack Obama in the Oval Office.

There, our president, on his own turf, was put on the spot, to put it mildly, before a watching world in what could be considered to be bold political maneuvering.

[5 : 22] The prime minister took issue with the president's stance on Middle Eastern peace. The president's opponents, of course, were quick to jump on this and to criticize him.

Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney, commenting on these things, said that President Obama had thrown Israel under the bus.

Very interesting comments, given the passage that we find ourselves in today. a passage that ultimately concerns God's relationship with Israel, particularly in Paul's day, but not to exclude us in our day.

For different reasons, there were those who were wondering, given Israel's rebellion, we see that in chapter 10, verse 21, had God thrown Israel under the bus?

In our verses today, and this is a very stunning passage of scripture, and hopefully I can enable you to have the sense of really what is being said and done in this passage with great situational meaning for the church of that day, but also great situational meaning for us even in our day.

[6 : 50] As you look around in our congregation, you're bound to see someone who is not like you. Whether we're talking about gender or race or educational accomplishments, that's one of the beauties of the body of Christ, that though we come from varied backgrounds, we all come through the cross and we can share the fellowship of the body of Christ.

But Paul helps us to see that the mercy of God has been reserved for both Jew and Gentile alike. I believe that's what he's centering in on here. Of course, Israel comes to the forefront, but it's not at the exclusion of the Gentiles that we look at this particular chapter that is before us.

One of the things that Paul enables us to see very clearly, the rebellion of Israel did not mean the rejection of God. We see that very clearly, don't we, as we begin even in chapter 11, verse 1.

I ask then, has God rejected his people? And again, using this rhetorical kind of method that we've seen elsewhere in the book, Paul presents a question, he gives an emphatic by no means, no way, and then he proceeds to give an explanation of what he has said.

[8 : 24] You see there, by no means, for I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

God has not rejected his people. No way. And notice the explanation that follows. Paul gives an exhibit A of why he says what he does.

And his exhibit A is himself. His own personal experience was proof that God had not written his people off.

And you see his ethnic and racial tribal credentials there before us. The evidence of his Jewish heritage that he puts it forward. And his heritage was rooted in patriarchal kind of soil.

Those so situated by his own testimony, he was a rebel. Paul was. He records that in 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verses 13 through 16.

[9 : 27] Don't turn to it. Though formerly I was a blasphemer, listen to this, persecutor and an insolent opponent, but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief.

But I've received mercy for this reason that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

Exhibit A. Paul's own life proof that God had not rejected his people. Paul himself, a rebellious Israelite, had been a recipient of God's mercy.

But he wasn't the only one. Look at verses 2 through 6. A remnant of the nation of Israel had also been recipients of the very mercies of God.

Notice what he says. He refers back to an Old Testament illustration in the life of Elijah. In the first part of verse 2, Paul reinforces what he's already said in verse 1.

[10 : 40] God has not rejected his people. He had not abandoned, that's the idea, or cast away those that he has chosen to set his love upon, those whom he foreknew.

He had not cast them out as a toy that was no longer to be used. He had not put them out for trash pickup, if you will. No, he had set his love upon them.

He had embraced them with his love, and his love was covenantal, and he was bound to fulfill that. Paul quickly went to the scriptures that referred to a time of the nation's apostasy when Elijah, though he felt he was alone, and he had alone, had remained faithful to God, God showed him otherwise.

Notice what it says there, huh? Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel, Lord? They have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone and left, and they seek my life.

But what is God's reply to him? I've kept for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. So too, in the present time, there is a remnant, a fraction of the whole, and it is chosen by grace.

[12:01] What's Paul's point? Just as there was a remnant of faithful people in Israel in Elijah's day, so there was in Paul's day a remnant, a fraction of the whole that was chosen by grace.

Far from rejection, huh? Actually, there was preservation. God had sovereignly and graciously provided for a remnant, a part of the whole.

Oh, I love these verses, verses 5 and 6. Do you see the prominence of grace there? Chosen by grace. Grace comes into view four different times.

And there are some things that we learn or are refreshed on about grace from these particular verses. Grace is something that is received. achieved. It is not achieved.

It's not based on what we do. Because grace and works do not mix. Wages are a result of works. Grace is not based on the labors of your hands or my hands.

[13:06] The conditions in which grace thrive are bankruptcy and blindness and poverty and with those who recognize they are in the midst of those kinds of conditions.

Grace is where God takes the initiative. It's sovereign grace. It's based on God's holy will and Jesus Christ himself is the personification of it.

Thus we can sing very robustly amazing grace how sweet the sound and wonderful grace of Jesus that is greater than all my sin and oh to grace how great a debtor daily I am constrained to be.

God's grace God's sovereign grace for his people God's favor towards the undeserving. But notice though God had not rejected he in fact had preserved a remnant the rest of Israel you see that hardened by sin look at verse 7 what then Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking the elect obtained it but the rest notice they were hardened while verses 2-6 speak of the remnant verses 7-10 speak of the rest Israel as a whole failed to obtain what she had sought after what had she sought after you don't have to turn to it Romans 9 verse 31 a right standing with God based on the works of the law that is what she was in pursuit of many were on this dead end path even in Jesus day and from them the

Lord had sovereignly chosen some and put them on the right path that's the remnant this was and is only by grace among those who called themselves Israelite there were those who were elect the remnant and then there were the rest they were hardened they were locked into their unbelief and in the quotations that follow in the text here we see the nature of heartening oh I tell you to be hardened in unbelief is not something friends that we want unfortunately what the Israel of Paul's day was experiencing was not new and that's what Paul is showing Israel of old even those who were on the shadow of redemption in Egypt was also partially blinded to God's gracious work intermixed so he quotes this Deuteronomy chapter 29 actually they were on the threshold of going into the promised land and thus we see the verse there

[15:57] God gave them a stupor eyes that would a spirit of stupor eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear even to this very day he quotes that he appeals to Moses words in Deuteronomy they were spoken by Moses and even the history of God's evident working on their behalf they still didn't quite get it 40 years after their deliverance from Egypt this great benchmark in the life of ancient Israel there were ways in which they were still insensitive and blind and deaf and those who persisted in unbelief were hardened in their unbelief God gave them a spirit of stupor again it seems like the spirit of confusion eyes that couldn't see stepping into unbelief can be like stepping into wet cement that eventually hardens and one cannot get out even if they would like to there's a warning here friends against unbelief a warning to those who might even wear unbelief as a badge of honor those who ridicule people of faith those who make light of those who really trust in

God's word those who might light of those who believe in God's son unbelief friends should be resisted at all costs because you really don't want to be hardened in unbelief huh we could go on but let me skip quickly give you a summary of what's in verses 1 through 10 and then move on on this afternoon as it concerned Israel God had not rejected his people a remnant was saved and the rest were hardened in their unbelief God had not forsaken his people evidence of that a remnant of people chosen by grace that was the evidence huh Paul not only had a word friends about Israel he had a word for the Gentile church at Rome huh it was mixed but the Gentiles were in this church at Rome the beginning of the next section is marked if you notice in verse 11 by another question with an emphatic answer and then he goes on to explanation in these verses

Paul notes the implications of unbelief of the unbelief of Israel for the Gentiles so what does it mean that the the Israelites were locked in unbelief where there were some implications for Gentile people notice what he says he picks up on the stumbling in verse 9 so I asked did they stumble in order that's Israel that they might fall or ultimately fall here's his emphatic answer again by no means rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles so as to make Israel jealous huh wow those who were strange for God were marked for mercy by God and it was through things and people Jewish I think that's what Paul is trying to get across Jewish situations and Jewish people that and God was very intentional that they had really come into the church

Paul is very intentional in getting this cross look at verse 11 it was through Israelites stumbling that salvation had come to the Gentiles and notice you'll see the pronoun they're this and they're that he's speaking about the Israelites through Israelite trespass came riches for the world and through Israelite failure came riches for the Gentiles well look here now you're fellowshipping with these Gentile people and Jewish people in this one body and you need to know something about these people that you're interacting with good or bad or indifferent it was not only that but through this Israelite or Jewish apostle verse 13 that the gospel had come and it was through Israelite rejection of the gospel of reconciliation that had come reconciliation for the world verse 15 verse 16 through holy dough and holy root it was essentially

Israelite the holy dough and the holy root that you see in verse 16 that's being referred to essentially Israelite the stumbling of the Jew meant that the gospel had gone to rebellious Gentiles and mentioning these realities Paul could have been keeping in mind the Jew and the Gentile people to gain an appreciation for one another again that seems to be what is part of his motivation there in this church of mixed people helping them to see hey you've got some Jewish roots here and though the Jews were rebellious on the one hand guess what there's some rebellious Gentiles matter of fact you were a wild olive shoot huh what are the implications of that is that they were rebellious too huh they were far from God so it's sort of like you know the pot can't talk about the kettle all of you have been recipients of the grace of

[21 : 32] God live like it huh live like it relate like it huh and again this seems to be what he's doing though Israel had stumbled in unbelief it was that she it was not that she might ultimately fall emphatically no that wasn't it huh rather the rejection by Israel meant an open door for Gentile people again so these people they were sort of living together and relating together and Paul wanted them to see and to appreciate one another you will see some specific commands as it relates to that as we get on into the more practical particularly in chapters 14 and 15 but again there's these dynamics that were going on that were a part of this congregation huh the rejection of Israel meant that an open door for the gospel amongst the Gentile not only that it was also to provoke the Jews to jealousy boy this particular passage is so so meaningful huh just as

Paul has spoken from the vantage point of a Jew in verse 1 he spoke to them from the vantage point of being appointed by God as an apostle to the Gentiles in verse 13 and here's the deal he could speak authoritatively to both groups huh he treasured his role huh provoking his fellow Jewish countrymen to jealousy and thereby saving some of them but here he speaks to the Gentiles about the Jews about what their increasing inclusion for the world would mean that so you got all of these dynamics that are going on in this congregation and Paul is speaking to them and helping them to understand so that they would be able to treasure what God had placed in their midst the Jews were a necessary point of God's plan for the world what motivation for cooperation and acceptance these two groups were in the gospel together for the glory of God huh verses 17 through 24 essentially say this that God's people are all a part of the same tree whether

Jew or Gentiles huh there if you will look there you will see there there's this you and them kind of language the Gentile branch a wild olive shoot grafted in amongst the branches of the tree the Gentiles in the Roman church are getting clear instruction they are not to be arrogant toward the branches verse 13 as a branch they were supported by the root not the reverse and they were not to get the big head once again boasting and we've seen this boasting was included was to be excluded huh they were not to be arrogant verse 18 but neither were they to be filled with pride verse 19 huh great picture uses this imagery of this tree in which there's this root that probably speaks about God's covenant with the patriarchs and then there is this tree and the branches some of the branches were broken off because of unbelief and there was this wild shoot that was grafted into the tree and growing again all due to faith notice in verses 20 let's see 20 begin there this is true therefore they are broken out because of their unbelief but you stand fast through faith so do

not become proud but fear huh for if

God did not spare the natural branches neither will he spare you note then the kindness and severity of God severity to those who had fallen but God's kindness toward you provided you continue in his kindness otherwise you too will be cut off huh well it's good to know that unbelief is not terminal huh huh the same God who had grafted the wild olive shoots into the tree has the power to restore those who are removed because of unbelief huh what Paul says is that they are in reach of the gospel huh he has power to graft those who fell by unbelief back into the tree huh well let me move to a close I've had to abbreviate a lot but again this hopefully what I'm going to say now will help you pull some of these things together and maybe in your own study you can help to shed you some light on it here's why this passage is meaningful understanding the Jew Gentile tensions in Rome Paul's teaching had the potential of helping them to change their attitudes toward one another so the question that we ask ourselves how do you change attitudes or affect change in a potentially hostile environment how do you do that one of the things notice how Paul did get acquainted with people's history from God's perspective get acquainted with the history of the people that you are amongst from God's perspective get acquainted with people's backgrounds both the negative and the positive dimensions of it and not only that uphold what God is doing and has done in them again I think from our own African

[27 : 41] American history one of the things that was deficient in my educational upbringing was just the positive portrayal of African American people I often say black did not become beautiful until I was almost out of high school as far as in the culture because it has some of the best kept secrets in American history concern African American people but those things not until after I was out of high school did not become in vogue and therefore there is a large ignorance of what happens in and among in African American history and amongst African American people there is a void get acquainted with history but not simply history history from God's vantage point history from God's perspective and uphold what

God has done and is doing again that can be a missing link and people learning how to appreciate one another notice what Paul does in the text he helps them to see hey this is what God has done this might be a negative piece but here you gotta look at this also and see this as far as God's hand in the lives of these particular people Paul here helps the Gentiles to view the Jews with respect and appreciation and not with arrogance and with pride he helps them see that what had befallen the Jews could in fact happen to them and that you beware you can be in unbelief too huh what Paul helps them to do is help them to see that they were all in the family together each of them Jew and Gentile who were a part of the church had been recipients of

God's mercy Jew and Gentile all in the family together and though the Jews had stumbled they were not beyond recovery huh what he's saying you need to see friends and you need to respect and understand the entire story because if you just see one part of it you could go astray and it could damage your relationships huh you're in the family because they stumble!

that that needs to be a part of what you factor in in your relating to them riches has come to the world and it's come through them huh you're part of the same tree you share the same root boasting is not to be a part of the family as you're in the family together huh one of the greatest sitcoms ever was all in the family bigoted Archie bunker I mean he was your classic wasp if you will I mean he was bigoted and prejudiced as a concern religion and race and politics and gender huh those folks would not be in Archie's family those other people huh but because all of us friends have come through the cross regardless of where you come from all of us have come into the family in the same way huh and understanding that that everybody has been a recipient of

God's mercy your background may be different you may have never done A B C and D but there it's all by sovereign grace and there are no shortcuts to the cross everybody my uncle used to say lotty dotty and everybody has to come through the cross that's the way it works that's the way that it is huh and so as we look around and see different people even in our congregation as we understand and appreciate one another that all of us have come through the same way all of us have the same savior what or the implication of God what Paul is saying here he has reserved mercy for Jew and Gentile alike and all who have received mercy should humbly receive each other and honor one another everybody all who have been recipient of God's mercy need to humbly receive each other and to honor one another that's

[32 : 40] Romans 11 that's the practical piece of what we see here we must humbly friends stand in awe of God's mercy and receive others who have received the same that's your takeaway from

Romans chapter 11 let me read this and I'm through as we prepare for the table and I think this is a great day to come to the table as we think of a text like this all are in the family there will be people who will be coming down these aisles some perhaps have been saved from the hardness and the brokenness of sin some of you perhaps have never drunk from the cup of the heart of the heart life but guess what you have come likewise have come through the cross and have been a recipient of God's mercy listen to what Paul says and he that's Christ came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near listen to this for through him we both have access in one spirit to the father so then you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members check this out of the household of God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets

Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the spirit oh there was there was not and perhaps there was a measure of segregation in Rome and perhaps Paul was attacking that but there should be no segregation in the family of God we're all in one household we all ultimately come from one stock and it is through him Jesus that we receive mercy by his grace may we be energetic humble appreciative not arrogant for the glory and honor of God let me pray father we give thanks this afternoon for your goodness to us and pray that you would be honored and glorified in this church oh

God may we understand Romans 11 and its implications for all of us who are in this particular family may arrogance be far from us may appreciation be near be glorified in our midst in Christ's name amen to God