

Remnant Chosen by Grace

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Date: 16 August 2026

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[0:00] So if you want to open your Bibles and your apps to Romans 10 from verse 14 we'll be reading.

! And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!

But they have not all obeyed the gospel, for Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us? So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have. For their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.

[1:22] But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, I have been found by those who did not seek me.

I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me. But of Israel, he says, All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.

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. Did 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.

[2:51] 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 failed to obtain what it was seeking.

The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written. God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see, and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.

And 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 they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.

Well, good morning, everyone. My name's David.

I'm one of the pastors here. Warm welcome to you if this is your first time with us. Will you pray with me as we come to hear God's word?

[3:54] Let's pray. Father, we... Please help us not come with our own understanding to your word.

Please help us all sit under your word and learn from you. Lord, I pray that each one of us will see just how gracious a God you are.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. Well, I don't know about you, but when you look at the current condition of either individuals or society, it can be easy sometimes to lose hope.

There's loved ones of mine who don't trust Jesus, and to be honest, I've given up praying. I'm not putting that forward as an example to follow.

I'm just confessing. It's easy to lose hope. We can look at our post-Christian society. We can look at all Western societies that we've cut off our Judeo-Christian root.

[5:10] We can just lose hope. We can look within yourself and you're losing hope.

We might wonder, has God tried? God has tried. He's got his arms open wide and there's no response.

Is he just wiping his hands? I'm finished. I'm done. Is that God's attitude? Is that God's heart? I want to consider that question, is God finished with us, by looking at Romans 11, and the question is, is God finished with Abraham's descendants, with his people Israel?

So have your Bibles open to Romans 11. We're just covering the first 10 verses today. From what we've learned so far in Romans, what would our answer be to the opening question?

Has God rejected his people, that is the ethnic people, Israel? Has he rejected them? I think logically we might go, well, yeah.

[6:25] Chapter 10, so many in the days of Christ and the days following Christ rejected Jesus, even though clearly the Old Testament pointed forward to him.

They should have been first in line in believing in him. We saw that the reason they've just totally missed it is because they were trying to earn a right relationship with God by what they do.

And the law, you could never keep the law. Romans 3 verse 9, all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin. Sin is too powerful. They didn't submit to God's way of being right with him by faith in his sons.

We saw that God has brought salvation right up to their mouth and heart in the message of Jesus. Just accept Jesus.

Confess him as Lord and you're saved. But they haven't obeyed the message. So individuals who remain in that condition, refusing Jesus, they are sadly lost.

[7:40] But Abraham's descendants as a whole group. The people God chose for himself with their mass rejection of Jesus.

Surely that means God has rejected them as a whole. We all need to come up and sit under Romans 11.

It is a tricky passage. There's a lot of puzzling bits. And a lot of those puzzles are next week. So come back next week.

That'll be a good one. But the chapter has a simple point overall. And it's a thrilling point. And it shows the heart of God. He's not giving up on his people.

It's quite a simple point. And that is really good news. Even if we're not Jewish here. That's the heart of God. Now, I want to be clear.

[8:44] There's not a hint anywhere in this chapter or in the New Testament generally that there's two ways to be saved. One by faith and one by being a physical descendant of Abraham.

Not all Israel belong to Israel, chapter 9 says. It's always by faith in him, in Jesus. So this week and next week, let's sit under chapter 11 and see in what way has God remained faithful to Israelites to make them his people.

What we're going to see today, verses 1 to 6, is that God has kept a remnant for himself, chosen by grace. And verses 7 to 10, we see God's judicial just hardening of the rest.

Now, it's a bit surprising in verse 1, Paul immediately points to himself as evidence. No, God hasn't rejected his people. I'm an Israelite.

It feels a bit narcissistic, to be honest. But the conclusion he's working towards is verses 5 and 6.

Like when Israel was rejected and went into exile in the Old Testament, God always kept a remnant for himself, a part for himself.

[10:11] He always did. So that's the hope in the prophet Micah. He finishes his prophecy with, Who is a God like you? Pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance.

He's always kept a remnant. So Paul's not boasting in him choosing Christ. He's putting himself forward as evidence of God's incredibly gracious choosing grace.

I've mixed up those words, but you get my point. Even someone as hardened as himself. I think some Christians today engage in evangelism and apologetics.

And I could be wrong here, but I pick up this attitude that it's as if by their rational arguments, they can reason someone into faith.

Now, I'm all for apologetics. Please hear me correctly. I'm all for giving reason for the hope that we have. But you can't reason someone into faith.

[11:26] It's not powerful enough. I think you can't show such sacrificial love and compassion.

You can't love someone into faith. By all means, I'm saying we should do these things. Please hear me right. I don't think compassion on its own is powerful enough to save.

When we read Acts 1-7, the love of the church, it was such a bright, burning light.

There was not need anywhere in the church. Widows were cared for, left, right, and said, anyone who had property, I'll sell it. I don't care. I want to help them. It was such love.

And then you had Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin. The scripture says no one could withstand his wisdom.

[12:27] Like he gave the greatest gospel presentation. And you add to that, they were doing miraculous signs in those days. God had given all this light in word, in love, in signs.

Now, if we looked around Jerusalem at that time, and would we conclude, I think Saul is a bit of agnostic. He's just weighing up the evidence still. We wouldn't conclude that.

We would look at Saul and go, he is incredibly hardened to the light. In choosing to open Saul's eyes to see Jesus, God's grace is far greater than you and I would ever expect.

He's living proof that God chooses to save part of Israel. The mercy shown to Paul is an enormous encouragement.

He can have mercy on anyone. I think an implication for his readers would be all those resistant people in the synagogue, don't give up on them.

[13:56] Remember me. Remember how hardened I was. He restates the question in verse 2 as a solemn, emphatic statement.

God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. To foreknow is for God to choose to set his love on.

Now, it's hard to decide here whether Paul is speaking about the people as a whole. He chose Israel as a whole. Or whether he's talking about individuals.

I've set my love of individuals. And they will certainly be saved. I think scripture says both, so I don't really want to debate that point. Scripture says both.

I lean slightly towards that he's talking about individuals here. Because his whole point in this section is God has kept part. He's saved part for himself.

[15:03] But talk about over morning tea, I don't mind. Then he goes, verses 2 to 4, he offers Elijah as evidence that this is the way God has always operated.

This is God's heart. It was a very similar situation to the mass rejection of Jesus. If you know the story, I'm going to retell it in case you haven't heard it before.

But King Ahab at that time and Jezebel, they had led the whole people, basically the whole people, astray to worship Baal.

They had killed Yahweh's prophets, or most of them. And then you've got that famous confrontation up the top of Mount Carmel, where you've got all the prophets of Baal versus lonely Elijah.

And they build two altars, and they're crying out, okay, let's test, who's the living God? And the prophets of Baal build an altar, and they're crying out, they're cutting themselves, and there's silence.

[16:07] And then Elijah pours so much water on his altar that it fills a trench. It's just dripping wet. He prays a simple prayer, and... And then what happens?

There's mass revival. Israel turn in repentance, and they seek forgiveness, and they get a fresh start. And... No.

There is not a mass revival. They stay loyal to Baal. Jezebel said, I'm going to kill you, Elijah.

Elijah. And he runs for his life. And he's crying out to God, and he's accusing Israel, I'm the only one left who is faithful to you.

And what's God's response? He reassures Elijah, my plans have not failed. God was saying to Elijah, open your eyes to the horizons of my grace.

[17:33] It is far bigger than you can see. Verses 5 and 6 are the conclusion.

So too, at the present time, in the time of God revealing his Christ, there is a remnant chosen by grace.

But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works. Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace. Even with the widespread rejection of Jesus, God's faithfulness to his promises haven't failed.

He's keeping apart for himself. It's no longer by works. That's not saying it used to be by works. It's saying no longer think like that. It was never about works.

We've already covered that in chapter 10. Don't think it was ever by works. If it were by works, in Elijah's time, he would have rejected his people. So many times he would have rejected his people.

[18:40] After the golden calf, in Elijah's time, in the exiles. Because it's by grace, and it's always been by grace, God is totally free to shower down his salvation blessings.

And he's committed to saving part. Now, if the idea of God choosing is troubling you, you look within yourself to figure out, am I one of the ones God has chosen?

To ask that question, it's not helpful. It's to treat it as if it's on the basis of works. Am I seeing enough works in me that God is choosing me?

I loved Martin's metaphor of the car a few weeks ago. You don't need to know how the car works under the hood to drive a car.

You don't need to know how salvation totally works to be a Christian. That's God choosing. If you don't get it, that's okay. Just leave it to the mechanic.

[19 : 52] God knows how it works. Our business is to look at Christ and confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord. And believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead and you will be saved.

That's our business. So there's two groups within Israel. There's the elect and then there's the rest. Verse 7. He's saying the elect, the remnant, did get a right relationship with God by faith in Christ. But the rest have been hardened in their unbelief. I think it's important to note the ground, the reason for being a remnant.

If you dig down, what's the bottom line reason that I'm one of the remnant? What you'll find at the bottom is God's grace.

[20 : 57] If you look at the ground, if you dig down, what's the reason for being hardened? It's my unbelief.

It's God handing over someone to their choice not to believe. Paul, again, he creates a medley here of Old Testament verses and he's picking from, of the three major sections in the Old Testament, he picks one from each.

The whole Old Testament is saying this. So you've got the prophets, the law and the writings. This has always been the case. So what is hardening?

What is God hardening? It's not God adding something into a person that changes them. It's what we see in Romans 1. It's God handing someone over to their unbelief.

Romans 1, he gave them up. They were suppressing the truth and he gave them up to that foolish thinking. He gave them up to their idolatry.

[22 : 11] He let them go. He gave them up to their depravity. It's not God adding something in. It's just handing over.

Here in these verses that he quotes, we get a further description of the effect of this hardening.

Isaiah describes it as a stupor. It's a spiritual... You're just numb.

You're just apathetic. All this light. It's just insensitivity.

Moses says, You've seen all that the Lord did before you, before your eyes in the land of Egypt, the signs and those great wonders.

But to this day, the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear. It's not responding to salvation and God just hands over to that thinking.

[23 : 23] It's like what we see in John 9. Jesus healed the man born blind. And the man testifies before the Pharisees, if you remember it.

Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. And what's their conclusion? Excommunicate this guy. And Jesus finds the man, the healed man later.

And the man confesses him Lord. He worships him. And Jesus says these piercing words. And the Pharisees were in earshot. For judgment I came into this world. That those who do not see may see.

And those who see may become blind. They had enormous light. But by rejecting Jesus' clear evidence, they were hardening.

They were getting harder and harder to Jesus. It was the same in King David's day. There was those within Israel who wanted his death.

[24 : 30] Even though he's God's chosen king. All these quotations. From Moses to David to Isaiah to the Christ. There's always been many within Israel who reject God's word and salvation.

And God's hands them over to more and more insensitivity. And numbness and blindness. So has God rejected his people?

No. The elect deserve the same hardening. But by his gracious choice, he's kept a remnant for himself.

And next week, it's not the end of the story. I grew up surrounded by the gospel in my childhood.

Like Sunday through Saturday. School, church, family. It was everywhere. Now, I look back at my late teenage years and university days.

[25 : 49] Where I was trying to belong to the world. I was teetering on the edge of church. God had every right to hand me over to my foolish choices and my thinking.

He would have done me no wrong. Now, your story will be different in details. And you're wondering my details, aren't you, now?

But can't you look back and see that the only reason you came to faith or remained in faith was your great shepherd left the 99, picked you up, put you on his shoulders and carried you back.

Why should I gain from his reward? I can't give an answer.

Why should I gain from his reward? I can't give an answer. Let me tell you about someone else hardened in unbelief.

[27 : 02] Her name's Ayan Hrsi Ali. She was born in Somalia. In a clan that was Muslim. And when she was 21 years old, her father arranged a marriage saying it's God's will.

And she didn't want to get married to this man, so she ran away. She ran to Holland and found refuge there. So she wrote to her father asking for forgiveness and he wrote back disowning her. So there was a lot of hurt there. In 2002, she decided she wasn't a Muslim and decided to be an atheist.

That was her conclusion. And she wasn't just any atheist. She became an active public atheist. She spoke out about all religion.

And she was almost as prominent as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, if you've heard of those guys. That new atheism movement. She was, some considered her the fifth horseman of the new, like, she was very prominent.

[28 : 16] In her own words, she said, going all over the US and Europe, mocking Christians, making fun of them, making fun of faith. Ayaan teamed up with a prominent film director, Theo Fongau.

And she wanted to speak out about the treatment of women. And she was going to put verses of the Koran printed on actresses in this movie.

And when the film was aired, three months later, a man rode on a bicycle and chased Theo down and shot him and killed him.

And left a note on his body saying, you did this. It shall happen to you. And, like, the FBI would come to her regularly saying, you've got active threats against your life.

She became very afraid. She was overwhelmed by negative thoughts, she said. And she became dependent on alcohol.

[29 : 21] And just, she just went rock bottom. And she saw a psychologist. And the psychologist suggested, I think you're spiritually bankrupt.

You're just empty. And her advice was, you've tried everything else. Try praying. Probably get kicked out as a psychologist these days.

She gave that good advice. And the psychologist asked, if God existed, what would be his qualities? And she started describing them.

And she said she realized she was describing Jesus. And so she started to pray to Jesus. And she said something clicked. I haven't touched a drink since, she said.

Negative thoughts have ceased. The closer you get to the person of Jesus, the more attractive he is. All my life I have craved freedom. I crave love. In Jesus Christ I've found both.

[30 : 24] In 2004 she has a public debate discussion with Richard Dawkins. You can go look this up.

And Dawkins presses Ayan. The stuff they believe is absolute nonsense. You don't believe Jesus rose from the dead, surely.

And Ayan responds, I choose to believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Whatever limits you and I have placed on God, his power and his grace to save, the living God won't stay in your box.

He won't stay in my box. Because he's got a remnant. He's got a remnant chosen by grace. Like Elijah, we need to lift our eyes to the horizons of his grace.

They are so much bigger than we can imagine. When our loved ones first were insensitive to the cross of Jesus, we were in anguish.

[31 : 45] But then we got used to it, didn't we? Maybe you're not like me, sorry. We get used to it. We do need to accept that God has done them no wrong if he hands them over to their choices.

It's not just, you know, a different way to live life. It is life. It is life to have Jesus.