

Disobedience and God's Mercy

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[0 : 00] Well, it's wonderful to be with you today in a baptism service.

If you're new to the service today, I just want to let you know that we've been going through the book of Romans, and we're on Romans 11, and if you'd like to follow along, turn to 946 in the Bibles in your pews.

And it's great that it's a baptism day today, because one of the things that we prayed for, for the children who are baptized, is that they would not be ashamed to confess Christ crucified.

And that's really the hope and the prayer of the parents and the godparents, and all of us as well, that nothing would prevent them, nothing within them would make them ashamed of Christ and his gospel.

We all need God's grace in this, in all of our lives, because Paul knew this, we know this as well, that there is a temptation to be ashamed of the gospel.

[1 : 09] That's why Paul said, I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation, first to the Jews and then also to the Greek.

And that gospel that we hold up today is that Jesus has risen from the dead, that he is the promised Messiah, that by him we receive all of the grace of God, the forgiveness of sins, peace with God, eternal life.

All of the promises that Jim was talking about at the beginning of the baptism, all of those promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Yet Paul was continually questioned by this.

He had a challenging life. Imagine being somebody that for years and years is facing far more than the questions that the federal election candidates in Canada right now are facing.

Imagine having that kind of pressure, being questioned about your platform, month after month, year after year. And the difference is that there were countless debates that had no rules.

[2 : 21] There could even be violence thrown in as well. And the questions that Paul was asked by his own people were, is your gospel really powerful?

Is it as you say it is? If it is, for instance, why do people still die? Why do Christians die? Why do they suffer? Why do they experience pain in their life still, even though the Messiah has come? You know, if the kingdom has come in Jesus, why do you still sin? And we saw back in chapters 7 and 8, that Paul says there's no condemnation in Christ, despite the evidence of sin and death and suffering.

We fight against sin in the power of Jesus Christ. Remember what we said in the baptism, that we prayed that these children will fight bravely under the banner of Christ against sin, the world, and the devil.

So we fight against sin in his power. And in our suffering, we suffer with Christ. He causes all things to work together for good, for those who love him, for those who are called according to his purposes.

[3 : 36] Not only that, but much of our salvation is still to come. The Holy Spirit, Jesus, is a guarantee that creation will be redeemed by God, and that our bodies will be glorified.

There will be no more suffering and death and pain when Jesus comes again in great power. The resurrection of Jesus is behind us, and before us is his coming again, where he brings his glorious kingdom.

And the great constant in all of this is that nothing separates us. Nothing now, nothing in the future, can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

But not only was there this challenge to the gospel about why we sin, why there's suffering and death, but why is it, Paul, that if Jesus is the good news, the promised Messiah, why do most of the people of God, the Jewish people, reject Jesus?

Why has the vast majority said no to that gospel, which is life for his people? Doesn't mean that God is not faithful to his promises, not faithful to his people.

[4 : 51] Has his plan of salvation failed? Has he rejected his people? Well, Paul says in chapter 11, I ask, has God rejected his people?

I'll ask the same question. And he says, emphatically, by no means, exclamation point. He knows that God has not rejected his people.

And in fact, God's plan is being worked out even through rejection. Now, we know this in the gospel. Jesus' own life shows this to us.

Last week was Holy Week. And it was brought home to us in that week that Jesus suffered and died because of sin, because his own people rejected him.

But by God's immense power, his death was the sacrifice for the sins of the world. And his resurrection that we celebrated so joyously last week is the vindication of Jesus.

[5 : 57] It shows Jesus' rule over everything in heaven and on earth, including death. In the Alleluia Chorus at the end of the service last week, you know, there is that stirring climax where we sing King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

And we were singing about that glorious truth, that God rules over disobedience and rejection and brings his life, his goodness, his lordship into the world.

And God has ruled over disobedience and his people throughout Israel's history. If we read the Old Testament, it's full of that. And Paul says, start with me. He says, I'm an Israelite, in verse 1.

Blood descendant of Abraham and Benjamin. And everyone knew Paul's story, his testimony, how he persecuted Jesus as he jailed Christians, as he killed them, as he sought to destroy the church.

And yet here he is, now a servant of Jesus, preaching the good news of Jesus' lordship over everything. Clearly, God is doing something in his people.

[7 : 06] His gospel is at work in the people who rejected Jesus. And it's often easy to take the view that when people are disobedient to God, God has lost control.

We think of that in our own lives. People, friends, family that we know of in our own lives, maybe those people who are disobedient are somehow outside God's power and his rule.

But Paul says in verse 2 that God foreknew his people. In other words, God knew that his people would be a disobedient people, a people who would wander away from God and seek other gods as well.

He knew they would reject Jesus, but he chose them anyway. In fact, things got so bad, Paul tells us, that during the time of Elijah, God's people demolished God's altars.

They killed his prophets, and most were involved in the worst kind of idol worship. In Elijah, we read, despaired, didn't they? In verses 2 and 3 and 4, he despairs.

[8 : 14] He thinks, it's all over. But God said, no, there is a small remnant that I have chosen by grace, 7,000 who have not bowed down to Baal.

And by grace, they will continue to be faithful. And this has been the case in all of Israel's history. They have failed to obtain what they were seeking.

The elect obtained it, this small remnant, but the rest were hardened. And that's what 8 and 9, this is what Moses and Isaiah tells us in verse 8.

It's what David tells us in verse 9 and 10, that God's people were not hearing. They weren't seeing the truth of God. And so the thing that we have to ask again is does this mean that the people of God as a whole are a failure?

Were they rejected by God? Was the rejecting of Jesus the last straw? Did they stumble in order to fall and never get up? What Paul says again to us, in case we don't get it, is by no means.

[9 : 19] God is not finished with his people. And here's what God's purpose is. It's two parts. Look at verse 11. Right at the end of it, we read there that rather through their trespass, salvation has come to the Gentiles.

Well, here is God's power over disobedience. Paul's ministry was an example of this. He would go to a city and preach to the Jewish community.

Inevitably, most would reject him. Often he would be thrown out of the synagogue and his pattern would be to go preach to the Gentiles in the rest of the city. And amazingly, the Gentiles welcomed the good news of Jesus.

Their lives were radically changed. Many people came to faith. And in fact, so many that Paul became known as the apostle to the Gentiles in verse 13.

That was his name. And amazingly, Paul says here that the trespass of Israel is the reason for those riches being brought to the world.

[10:33] Now, Paul turns and he speaks to the Gentiles in verses 17 through 24. And this is really helpful for us. This is application for us, very personally and directly.

Our English language lets us down a bit because there's you and you look the same but mean very different things. Here, you is second person singular. I'm talking to you personally, Paul says, individually.

We need the language of Texas here. You and you all. Paul is saying you personally. it is important for you to hear this.

And what he says to them, first of all, is don't be arrogant. And the way Paul teaches about this is he says, Israel is like a tree.

And with Jesus coming, many of the branches of the tree have been broken off because they have rejected Jesus. But the Gentiles are like wild olive shoots, we read there in verse 17 following.

[11:37] And they are grafted in among the others and now they share the nourishing root of the olive tree. Paul says in verses 18-19, don't be arrogant towards the branches.

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

There is humility about this. Don't be arrogant towards the branches. If you are, remember, it is not you who support the root. The root supports you. There was arrogance in the church in Rome by Gentile Christians at that time towards the Jews.

And in our history of the church, there are terrible examples of arrogance against Jews as well. It is something always to repent of because they are our root.

They are our history. And we have become part of that people because Abraham is our father. God's promises that we saw in baptism, God's promises to Abraham are our promises.

[12:45] Their Bible is our Bible. We belong to God because God chose the Jews to be his people and Jesus to be their Messiah. And so, the right thing, Gentiles, Paul is saying, is to be thankful that he gave us salvation through Israel and that he has brought us into that chosen people by adoption.

On Good Friday, our family was invited next door for a Passover Shabbat meal. And in the middle of the table were all the symbols of the deliverance from Egypt displayed on a plate.

So there were bitter herbs to teach about the bitterness of slavery in Egypt. There was salad to represent the mortar for the bricks that the slaves had to make.

There was salt water representing the tears of those who were in slavery. There was unleavened bread as well, reminding that the people left in a hurry in obedience to God on the night of Passover.

There was egg with burned shells that were reminding us the life of the firstborn that God brought and the death that came as the last plague for the Egyptian people.

[14:03] And then finally, there was this bone of a lamb to remind them of the blood of the lamb that saved the firstborn. And when you see all these symbols and hear them talked about as a Christian, it is very, very meaningful in Holy Week because we remember then that Jesus delivered us from the bitterness of slavery to sin, delivered us away from a life without hope in God to a new life of obedience to Christ.

And he is that lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, the one who has brought our deliverance. The God who delivered the Jews from Egypt has become the God who delivers us from sin and death.

He adopts us into that family so that we too can call God Abba, Father. And so Passover was a very powerful way of remembering that God has grafted people into the faithful Israel through Jesus Christ.

and baptism does that for us today as well. We see that this is a sign that Jesus gave to the church of that great gift of being brought into God's family.

And Paul is saying we ought to be humbled and deeply grateful for being grafted in to that family. We can't be arrogant about it. This is a joyous thing that we have received as a gift.

[15:36] But secondly, Paul says, you Gentiles, and again that means you and I at St. John's must guard against complacency. Here's how he says it in verse 21.

He says, For if God did not spare us the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Oh, sorry. Verse 20.

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

And it's very easy for us to become proud, especially now because we are in a culture of entitlement. This is what surrounds us in Canada. And the belief very easily creeps in in us that we wild branches deserve that place among the natural branches.

To think that God favored us over unbelieving Jews because we are better. But the truth is that we are saved only by Jesus' righteousness. We can't go ahead and try to grab our own righteousness. [16:45] We can't depend on our long history of churchgoing or the fact that we like evangelical sermons and we like orthodox teaching or that we agree with other evangelicals or because we are involved in ministry.

We can't hold on to that. We stand by faith alone. Jesus has chosen us by his grace and he has grafted us in.

And Paul says here that the great way to combat pride is a holy fear. It's something that's a little counterintuitive but he says it is right for you to fear.

And what he means by that it is not a fear that repels us from God because Christ has given us a spirit of adoption. He has brought us into his family. We call God Father.

But it is a fear that believes that we are in the hands of God who is both severe and kind. Look at verse 22. Note that the kindness and the severity of God, severity towards those who have fallen but God's kindness to you provided that you continue in his kindness.

[17:59] There's a strong warning here against the danger of spiritual entitlement because this was the danger in Israel. This is how you become like the branches that were cut off.

God is holy. He hates sin and disobedient. One can't continue to willfully pursue this and continue to be part of God's people. God is severe.

He cuts off those branches. But God is also kind. And his kindness, which is generosity and a goodness, is the only reason that you and I have been grafted in.

And Paul says to us, continue in his kindness. Literally, he says, persist in it. Persevere in it. Strive to know God and his kindness as you obey him and as you follow our Lord Jesus.

And what that means is that you and I can never feel complacent, can never feel like we have arrived. We can't feel that we can just coast along.

[19:03] Because a branch that is grafted into the people of God is continually rejecting sin, but also striving to be changed day by day into the image of Jesus.

People who are grafted in rejoice every day in the saving work of Jesus. They strive to know God by obeying him. That's what it means to continue in God's kindness.

Well, now our passage closes by centering back on the Jews. Remember I said earlier that God's purpose has two parts.

First, through Israel's sin, salvation comes to the Gentiles. Well, we see the second part of that purpose, and that is through Israel's sin, salvation comes to Israel as well.

And we see in verse 23 that God has the power to graft them into the tree again. If they don't continue in their unbelief, he will do it, Paul says.

[20:07] And in fact, he says it's much more natural for those branches to be grafted in than those of us who are Gentiles. And I have seen this to be true.

I certainly see this in our neighbors. As we have, my Jewish neighbors, we have very good conversations about what we believe. And I see this in how they live as well.

And it is clear to me that they are close to faith in Christ because he fulfills everything they live for. And I pray for them that they will take that step of faith one day.

that they will receive the one who fulfills all of the promises that they hold so dear. And verse 25 tells us that God is doing exactly that work.

He says in verse 25, just to help your humility, I want you to understand a mystery. And what he means by that is a secret's been revealed here. Here it is. A partial hardening has come on Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

[21:12] And in this way all Israel will be saved as it is written. The Deliverer will come from Zion and he will banish ungodliness from Jacob.

This will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins. Now much has been written about what all Israel means. But what we do know is that it does not mean that every Jew will be saved.

And it doesn't mean the Jewish political state. What it does mean is that the Jews that God has chosen throughout the world will be saved by the Deliverer Jesus who will come again in great power.

God's not finished with them. His plan is to save them in the same way that Gentiles are being saved. By hearing the word of Christ and by putting their trust in him.

Paul says this is going to happen. In fact, Paul says that the salvation that came to Gentiles came with the Jews in mind so that they would be jealous or envious of the riches in Christ that they will see in the Gentiles' lives.

[22 : 20] That they will want to have that and believe that Jesus is the Messiah that they are waiting for. Paul clearly wants the church to reach out to unbelieving Jews in Rome as well as the Gentiles there.

And that's a word for us as well. I don't know if you've thought of that. That part of our mission at St. John's, part of your mission here is to reach out to Jewish unbelievers.

Do you pray for your Jewish friends? Are you willing to speak about the riches that you have in Jesus Christ? It is right for us to pray for them, to ask God, how can I reach your people in this world?

Well, we close with the point of all of Romans in verse 32 and I want to end with this. It's the point of chapters 9 through 11 and in fact all of Romans as well.

And he says this, for God has consigned all, that means Jews and Gentiles, to disobedience that me, he may have mercy on all.

[23 : 27] And what that's saying is that both Jews and Gentiles are the disobedient ones. They're all in the same boat and there's a reason for that. It is so God can be revealed as who he is.

The one who gives mercy. He is the one who gives mercy. This is his character. He gives mercy to those who are disobedient. That's the way he saves.

It is the way that you and I and the people around us have been grafted into his family. It is the way that Jews, the people of God, will be grafted in as well.

You see, chapters 9 through 11 is not primarily about Israel's unbelief and Paul being anxious and troubled about it. It's about, first of all, God's purposes that triumph over every human failing, even Israel's rejection.

His gospel is the power for salvation, first for the Jews and then the Gentiles. May you and I never be ashamed of that powerful gospel.

[24 : 33] May we continue in his kindness persevering until the great day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.