

Romans 11:1-24 The Remnant, 11/22/20

I attended a church during my freshman year in college and occasionally the pastor, instead of preaching the next chapter of the book of the Bible we were studying that Sunday, would say that he felt led to have a spontaneous time of testimony and worship. And so the band would play more music and people would share testimonies of what God is doing in their lives. I always thought it was a little unusual to skip that chapter but enjoyed the time of worship and testimony. Now that I am a pastor, I understand why preachers do that, they get to a section of Scripture that they really don't want to preach for one reason or another and so they suddenly feel led! OK I don't want to be too much of a skeptic...but I'm sure that's some of them. At BVBC we are committed to preaching through Scripture and we don't skip sections when they are hard to understand or seem irrelevant at first or might step on some people's toes. Chapter 11 is one of those passages that a lot of preachers skip because it's a little challenging to understand and at first blush it may seem like it has nothing to do with our world and our lives. Oh friends- there is so much in here for us today...far more than I can even get to and so we will take two weeks to get through it. So let's jump in.

Now, remember the big questions of chapters 9-11. Has God failed to keep his covenant promises to Israel? And if so, does that mean he might fail to keep his promises to us? What promises? Well how about the big one Paul ended with in Romans 8:39 Nothing can separate us from the love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord. If fails Israel, God is not glorious. And if God is not glorious, God is not God so let's pack it in, turn off this video, go eat some breakfast. But Paul again answers the question emphatically. Romans 11:1 *I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means!*

Paul then proceeds to give 5 Proofs for Why God hasn't Given Up on Israel (and why he won't give up on you).

#1 The Paul Proof: v.1b *I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.* Remember? Paul's Jewish. Is there a better example of God's faithfulness to Israel than taking the murderous, raging, Jesus-hating Saul and turning him into Paul a people-loving Jesus-freak? If God didn't give up on Paul, he won't give up on Israel. And God is still in the business of saving Jewish people by opening up their eyes to the Messiah. The greatest example I know personally is my former pastor and mentor- Lon Solomon (Picture) who went from selling drugs on the campus of UNC to a great evangelist and pastor. God has used Lon to reach thousands of Jews and Gentiles for Christ.

#2 The Election Proof: v.2 *God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.* This was the major lesson from chapter 9- God's foreknowledge is God setting His unconditional, electing love on people before the foundation of the world. If God is the one saving, He cannot fail. And Proof #3 is an example of this.

#3 The Elijah Proof: v.2-4 ²*Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah (1 Kings 19)—how he appealed to God against Israel: ³“Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me”?*

⁴*And what was God's answer to him? “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”*

Elijah is having this big pity party for himself. He's depressed and thinks he's the last true follower of God. And then he finds out that God has been doing something he didn't know about—a beacon of light comes from a place he didn't even know about. Let me say, this isn't just a proof for God's promise to Israel, it's a proof to us that this is God's world, this is God's mission. If you would have been around in the 1st century, who would have thought within a couple hundred years the Roman Empire- the darkest, most idolatrous, boastful, most corrupted empire in the world would become a beacon of Christianity? And if you had lived in the 4th century, would you ever have thought that the center of Christianity would shift to the English speaking world--who were at the time a bunch of barbarians and savage tribesmen? And could you ever predicted that when European Christianity was going liberal and secular, that a little upstart country called the United States, which at the time of Paul didn't even exist yet on a continent they didn't even know about, would become the most massive missions-sending country in history?¹ How about today? the church is growing fastest in China, S. Korea, India, Latin America, and Africa—in countries that we thought were completely closed to the gospel, some of the most dangerous parts of the world. Don't think for a second that just because you see less Christians around you that somehow God is defeated or has failed. Maybe it's just that God is up to something you don't know about.

#4 The Grace Proof. v.5-6 ⁵*So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.* Grace flows from the very nature of God. He gives gifts that we have not earned. His nature of grace guarantees that there will always be a remnant of saved Israel throughout the centuries. Not because there a good and religious Jews...that is true, but by grace.

You say, “wow- we are already at the last proof, this sermon is going to be short!” Not so fast, between the 4th and 5th proof, Paul stops to ask another rhetorical question that people may be asking. ¹¹*Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?* Why would this be the question in people's minds? Because up until now, Paul's proofs for why Israel has not failed Israel have been true, but insufficient...maybe even a letdown. What if I told my kids- “I'm planning an amazing, lavish, vacation that you are never going to forget, we will be talking about this vacation the rest of our lives!” And then we drive over to motel at the Jersey shore for a couple days. You would say... “Ok, technically it is a vacation. We will have some fun. But...a little motel pool and an overcrowded beach isn't exactly what we had in mind.”

¹ Great application by J.D. Greear

“OK Paul, technically we get it, there are a few Jews that have embraced Jesus as the Messiah throughout the centuries, but most have not. As verse 7-10 says, in response to rejecting the Messiah, God has hardened their hearts to the truth...most are inoculated to the gospel of Jesus. So is that really what God had in mind when He promised He would bless Israel and give them an inheritance?” So the question- “Did they stumble beyond recovery?” Is a way of asking- Is that it? There has got to be more in store for the Jewish people than that! Yes, there is much more in store for Israel, Paul says. God isn’t done, he’s just getting started. In fact, Paul says that God is even using their rejection to accomplish far greater purposes. **He shares three stages of Israel in relation to God’s plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.**²

Stage 1 comes from v.11 *Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles.*

Stage One: Missional Rejection, Israel’s rejection Opens Wide the Doors of Salvation. And this is the pattern that we see in the book of Acts. The Apostles first preach the gospel in the local Jewish synagogue. The Jewish reaction there is mixed, with a few believing but most rejecting. This rejection drives the Apostles out of the synagogue to preach in the public areas of the city, in the streets and marketplaces, where they find a lot of Gentiles with ready hearts to believe. And, within 100 years, Christianity becomes a thriving multiethnic movement comprised of Jews and Gentiles, slaves and freemen, every group imaginable in the empire. Now, imagine if in every town the whole synagogue had been converted. The Apostles may have grown complacent and never gotten out into the city, and Christianity could easily have remained or have been seen as a Jewish thing. Now from a human standpoint it looks coincidental, but in God’s providence this is exactly what he had in mind. Acts 1:8 You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Stage 2: v.11b *salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. I take pride in my ministry¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.*

Stage 2 Missional Jealousy. Now that sounds wrong...like if your girlfriend flirts with other guys just to make you jealous...that’s just not right. But think of it like this: Imagine my kids didn’t want to live with us anymore—and so we began to foster children. And on Christmas morning my biological kids don’t have a loving home and are cold and lonely and they look through the windows of our house see all these other children sitting around the Christmas tree with all these presents. And my kids say, “We could have had that. I miss that relationship and all the blessings it brings.”³ Paul is saying that Christians who have the blessing of a saving relationship with God and all that it brings should live in such a way, through our joy, our hope, our love, our community that it causes the Jewish people who have the history with God, to say- I want that. I want that sense of closeness those Christians feel toward God. And there are many stories

² Concept from *Romans for You*, Tim Keller

³ Illustration from J.D. Greear

coming out of Israel like that right now. Meet **Yoel and Adel Ben David (Picture)**.⁴ Who live in Jerusalem and were Hasidic Jews until one day they met Judy, an elderly Christian woman who lived in Israel and befriended the young couple. Adel said what struck them about Judy is she spoke like she actually knew God, like she had a relationship with Him. And soon that led to them desiring what she had and an encounter with Jesus through reading Isaiah 53.

Of course, **missional Jealousy** isn't just reserved to reach the Jewish people. Are we living in such a way that people are jealous of what we have in our relationship with God, the joy in our lives, the peace we have in the storms? Or do they only see grumpy Christians, only see Christians angry or fighting with each other, or complaining about politics or masks or the next generation. Oh church, this is what Jesus meant when he said you are the light on the hill! Let's make people the right kind of jealous like Judy did.

Stage Three- Future Revival.

v.12, 15-16 But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!

¹⁵For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Are you following Paul's train of thought? He seems to be suggesting that the remnant is a sign, like the firstfruits are a sign of the harvest to come, of a much larger spiritual revival in the future for Israel. And Paul will say this in no uncertain terms in verse 25-30 which we will talk about next week.

And this is of course our final proof that God has not failed to keep his promises. **#5 The Future Revival Proof.** Revival coming for Israel. God isn't done with His people. Now this is as far as we are going to go in the text today because we want to take a second and talk about how this applies to you and me.

Even in Israel's rejection and hard-heartedness, even the remnant looks insignificant, even when things look bleak and it's hard to see God at work, **God is just getting started!** God is working providentially behind the scenes to accomplish His glorious, saving purposes and to fulfill His promises. Israel's rejection opens the doors for our salvation! Does that sound familiar? Isn't this just like God? Isn't that what he has done with Joseph? His brothers sell him into slavery and fake his death. A great evil! I mean my brothers were pretty mean to me, they made me eat grass one time... but never this...and yet behind the scenes, decades later God raises up Joseph to save thousands of people from a famine throughout the land of Egypt, including Joseph's brothers and family! What they meant for evil, God intended for good. God wasn't done, he was just getting started!

⁴ True story from Jews4Jesus.org

And this is a foreshadowing of what Jesus would do. Israel rejected their messiah. And it looked bleak, even his own disciples abandoned him, it just looked like an insignificant Jewish rabbi who becomes a victim of his circumstances. "Where is God in this?" the people of God would have asked in that day? God wasn't done, He was just getting started! God was working it all out for His glorious plan of salvation, not just ours, not just the Jewish people, but through Jesus He will make all things new.

All this to say...**don't you give up on God!** Unlike us, God finishes everything he starts. He made promises to Israel and he will keep them. He made promises to you and I, and He will keep them. Where are you tempted to think God has given up in your life?

Don't you dare think that God must be done, He's just getting started! Don't get depressed, thinking this pandemic seems to have killed any momentum we had. God is just getting started! Don't you dare think God has given up on your Jewish friends, your neighbor, your son or daughter... Friend maybe he's just getting started! Maybe you are watching this and you think that you are too far gone for God to save you, or use you. **God hasn't given up on you!**
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