

## **Romans 9:1-11:10**

### **The Sovereignty of God- the Reason for Israel's Rejection of the Universal Good News of the Gospel** *"The Election and Predestination of God and Israel's Unbelief in God's Grace"*

Paul has laid out the gospel of Jesus Christ in its fullest form in the first eight chapters of Romans. He began with the bad news first in Romans 1-3, showing us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and that all are without excuse before a Holy God, whether Jew or Gentile. In the latter half of Romans 3 Paul gives us the solution to the sin problem that separates from God. He says that God the Father sent God the Son into the world in order to take human flesh upon himself so that he could live a perfect life for a sinful humanity and die sinners death, in the place of sinners, thus satisfying God's justice on sin and forever freeing us from sin's consequences. This is a saving act of grace on the part of God and it saves and reconciles us unto God when we receive it in simple childlike faith.

This posed a problem for some of Paul's original readers. "Paul, that sounds too good to be true and it sounds way too easy. What about the law and the necessity of keeping God's commandments so that we can be saved? It sounds like what you are saying to us contradicts what the OT Scriptures teach us about salvation." Paul responded in chapters 4-6 by explaining to his readers from the OT Scriptures that faith alone, but not by itself, has always been the way of salvation. So Paul showed them from the OT Scriptures how two its main characters, Abraham and David, were justified (made right with God) on the grounds of faith.

But there was still a problem even after that. Now his readers were saying, "OK Paul we get what you are saying. You have showed us how we have all sinned and are without excuse, and you have showed us that what Christ has done for us is the only thing that can get us out of the mess we are in, and you have shown us that all we have to do is to embrace by faith what he has done for us in his life, death, and resurrection in order to save us and we will be saved. Paul we get it, but if it is true that we are not justified by doing the works of the law but solely by trusting in Christ alone, then doesn't that mean we can do anything we like? If faith in Jesus is all that God requires in order for me to be saved then I guess I can keep on sinning. In fact I think I will keep on sinning. This is the best deal in the world. I got fire insurance so I'm going to play with fire."

To this Paul's says an emphatic no in Romans 6-8. In Romans 6-8 Paul makes the case that Jesus has saved us in order to make us into a new creation; therefore he has saved us in order to mortify the power of sin in our lives so that we can become the new creations that Christ has saved us to be. Therefore it is inappropriate to sin so that grace may abound all the more. Through the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus seeks to crush the power of sin in our lives; therefore we must die to it every day. This our necessary and appropriate response to being saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ alone.

But there was one more potential objection to Paul's explanation of the gospel and it went like this: "OK Paul we got what you are saying. We are all sinners and without excuse and we deserve death for our sin. We get it. We also get that Christ has come to save us from God's wrath on sin by his perfect life, death, and resurrection. And we also get that we receive what God has done for us in Christ solely on the grounds of faith, and we also understand that just because we are saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ alone that it is no excuse to sin. Paul, we all get it, but if this gospel is so good and if it is actually true then why haven't more Jews embraced the message? Why do so many Jews reject the gospel if it is true?" It's a great question and one that is still asked by many even today.

Christians often ask, “Why don’t more Jews don’t believe in Jesus as Messiah?” This is the question we will seek to answer today from the text. We have entered the last section of Paul’s gospel presentation and this is the question he tackles.

Paul answers this question in four ways. (I am not going to answer chronologically in the same order that Paul answers it, but rather I am going to give you his answer from the easiest to the hardest, in terms of understanding.)

First, Paul says it’s not as big a failure as you may think. In short, some Jews have actually believed in the Messiah. In the text Paul says that he himself is a Jew. **“I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, born of the Jewish tribe of Benjamin.”** (v.1) I would add that Jesus, as it concerned his human nature, was also a full blooded Jew. So were his 12 disciples, as well as most all of his followers in the gospels. There *were* Jews who believed in Jesus as Messiah. That’s one way Paul answered the question.

Second, though the number of Jews who believed were small, it was not the first time a few Jews had believed. Paul points out in the text (Rom. 11:2-5) that during the OT times of the prophet Elijah, when Ahab was king of Israel and the queen was wicked Jezebel, that there were only a few Jews who believed. **“Don’t you know what the Scriptures say in the passage about Elijah- how he appealed to God against Israel? ‘Lord they have killed your prophets and torn down your alters; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me?’ And what was God’s answer to him? ‘I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’”**

That is Paul’s way of saying there is nothing new under the sun. It’s not the first time the Jews, or any other people for that matter, has not believed the truth concerning God. In essence, Paul says to his readers, “If you’re going to ditch the gospel on the grounds that it is not true because if it were true more Jews would have believed in Jesus then you must also ditch the entire OT, because there were plenty of Jews in the OT who didn’t believe as well. Look at your own Scripture and you will see that it is so.”

Third, Paul says that there are not many Jews who have come to faith in Christ yet simply because they did not believe. Simple enough.

Paul says in the text that **“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead then you will be saved.”** (10:9) The Jews heard this gospel, yet Paul says **“But not all the Israelites accepted the good news.”** (10:16) This is Paul’s way of saying that the Jews bear some responsibility for their unbelief because they chose not to believe. That reason is easy to understand. If you believe then you are saved, if you don’t then you are not.

Now we come to the fourth and final reason that Paul gave to this question of why the Jews had not believed in Jesus as Messiah. And this last reason, according to the text, seems to be the chief reason why they did not believe. I say that on the grounds that it is the one that that gets the most coverage in the text. The last reason takes up most all of chapter 9 and then Paul comes back to it and stays on it throughout all of chapter 11. So all of the stuff that Paul said about the Jewish remnant who did believe in the time of Elijah, and those who by their own personal choice chose not to believe, is framed, bracketed, and contained within the larger context of the fourth reason that I am about to give.

Now before I give it to you let me say this: The reason the fourth reason is so hard to understand is not because it’s hard to understand, truly it isn’t, the reason it is so hard to understand is because most people don’t like the fourth reason and because they don’t like it they constantly say, “I just don’t understand it.”

The reason it doesn't make sense to many is because people don't like believing what may offend their sensibilities. Now are you ready for the fourth reason?

The fourth reason for the unbelief of the Jews is the sovereignty of God and the election of God in salvation. Another way we could talk about it is by using the word predestination, which Paul used in Romans 8.

Now what do those fat words mean? Sovereignty of God? Election and predestination? It simply means that God has the final choice in salvation and God will save those whom He wills to save and those whom He does not will to save He won't save. Would God be God if he willed that everyone be saved when in fact they are not? Clearly not everyone is saved. Clearly, the scriptures speak of damnation and separation from God. So if all are not saved, and yet God wills that all people be saved then what does that make God? Does it make Him a failure? And if so can God be God and still be a failure?

Enough mental gymnastics. Let me put it to you plainly. Paul says in the text that the reason many of the Jews have rejected Jesus as Messiah is because God willed it as such. In our reading Paul speaks of the text in Genesis which states that God loved Jacob and hated Esau, even before they were birthed out the womb of Rebekah. Paul also recounts the texts in the book of Exodus that repeatedly say that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh so that He might display his glory and mighty power in His acts of judgment against Egypt. In chapter 11 Paul quotes a text from Isaiah (29:10) that speaks of God giving the Israelites **"a spirit of stupor and eyes that could not see, and ears that could not hear so that God's purposes in election might stand."**

That's the reason they didn't believe and many don't like that reason because it lays man's unbelief and damnation in the hands of God to *some* extent. That *is* true but we must also remember that **"all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God"** and that **"the wages of sin is death."** That is to say that all human beings are sinners because all have sinned. And all of us come into this world predisposed to aim for the wrong things in our lives- me, myself, and I. That is to say that man needs no help from God on his downward path to hell. He walks it well by himself. So we must remember that God is not obligated to save anyone, much less everyone.

So if we want to frame this as a discussion about what God is obligated to do then we would have to say that God is obligated to be fair, and if He is going to be fair in then in His fairness He is going to have to give every human being what they deserve- death. **"The wages of sin is death."** So who are we, as Paul quotes Job, to talk back to God about who is and isn't saved? **"Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, why did you make me like this? Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?"**

These are the reasons (with reason 4 being the chief one) why most of Israel yet to believe in Jesus as Messiah, according to the text of Scripture given by God to us in Paul's letter to the Romans. We may not like it but this is what it says and what it means if it is properly understood.

Believe it or not, there is good news as it concerns this final reason. Just as there was good news in the Palm Sunday text from Luke's gospel, which says that what would bring Jerusalem peace was hidden from her eyes. So too is there also good news in God giving Israel **"a spirit of stupor"** so they would not believe in Jesus as Messiah. Both acts of God have their redemptive purposes in mind.

Because God hid from Jerusalem what would bring her true peace they crucified Christ. And since she crucified Christ, salvation for the world was accomplished through his broken body and shed blood. Likewise, there was also a redemptive purpose in God's hardening the heart of Israel so they would not believe in the risen Christ, but I will save the answer until our next sermon from Romans.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit.