

Romans 11:11-36

The Mercy of God- The Purpose of Israel's Rejection of the Universal Good News of the Gospel *"The Present Salvation of the Gentiles and the Future Salvation of the Jews"*

One of the most basic truths in all the Bible is that Israel, God's chosen people, has been chosen by God for the purpose of blessing all the nations of the earth. This was the promise that God made to Abraham in the OT and it is a promise that we constantly see being fulfilled throughout the story of the Bible.

The other night I saw the movie *The Longest Ride*, a love story about a bull-rider from North Carolina and an aspiring artist attending Wake Forest University. Their love story parallels the story of an old Jewish couple. At the end of the movie, after Mr. Levinson, a Jew, dies (played by Alan Alda), an auction takes place according to his will, where his wife's art work, which is worth millions, is auctioned off. He arranged it as such that whoever bought the first piece of art, which was a picture of his wife, would get the whole art collection. The person who bought it would not find this out until after the picture of his wife was purchased. The bull-rider bought the picture of the man's wife to give to his sweetheart, who had become very close to the Jewish man, unbeknownst to the fact that he became a millionaire the moment he bought it.

When Nicolas Sparks wrote that scene into the storyline he probably did not have in mind the Abrahamic promise but that is exactly what is portrayed in that movie, an old Jewish couple, Israel, blesses a young couple, two gentiles, with an art collection worth millions.

Today in our text we see yet again how it is that God blesses all the nations of the earth through his chosen people the Jews. This blessing comes to us in a strange kind of way because it occurs in the context of Israel's rejection of Jesus as messiah. Not only that, but to make it even stranger, it occurs in the context of election and predestination.

As we saw a couple of weeks ago, Paul basically states that the reason the Jews, for the most part, rejected Jesus, is because God willed it as such. Paul goes so far as to say that God hardened their hearts. Remember Paul citing the OT texts about God hardening the heart of Pharaoh and the text where God says to Rebekah concerning the two children in her womb, Jacob and Esau, **"Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated?"**

Wow that is strong. Why would God do that?

Paul, reflecting on such a reality, says that God did it so that the gospel would go to the Gentile nations. The God of the Bible is a God of the nations and Israel's heart was hardened so that the pews would be empty in the synagogues when the first evangelists preached and since preachers don't like to preach to empty sanctuaries they had a choice- they could either close up shop or they could find someone else who would listen to their message. The gospel of Jesus was too powerful to quit preaching so the apostles found someone else who would listen to their message-namely the Gentile nations of the earth.

The implication of all of this is that if Israel had received the message of Jesus in droves then perhaps Christianity would have remained confined only to the Jewish people but because they rejected the message of Jesus the gospel went out to the world. God had willed Israel's rejection and He had hardened their hearts for greater purposes. It is enough to make your head spin and that is why Paul wrote what he wrote when he thought about this at the end of chapter 11.

**Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!
Who has known the mind of the Lord?**

That's all fine and well, in fact it is better than fine and well because the reason I am here today because of their rejection, but what about the Jews themselves? Will they remain forever hardened? Paul answers that question with a resounding no. He says in this text that after the full number of Gentiles have entered into the family of God there will be a great awakening and return of the Jewish people to embracing Jesus as Messiah. Paul goes so far as to say in the text that the Jews will become jealous of the great blessings poured out upon the Gentiles peoples by the gospel of Jesus Christ (11:11) and they will return in droves to the Messiah.

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited. Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of gentiles has come in and so all Israel will be saved. (11:25)

So what Paul is saying in the text is that God is not finished with Israel. Certainly God has completed his purpose in Israel to bless all the nations of the earth by the sending forth His Son, the Messiah Jesus, from her womb, but God is not finished with Israel in the sense that God is has inextricably bound Himself to her forever. This people is still "the apple of God's eye" in spite of all of her failures and shortcomings. God still loves her and He will be faithful to her all the way to the end. God will not break His covenant promises to her. Her heart may be hard now but one day, in the end, there will be a great repentance of the Jewish people to embracing Jesus as Messiah. So much so that Paul says in the end that **"all Israel will be saved."**

Let's talk about how this text applies to our lives as Christians.

First, God's purpose in Election and Predestination is primarily redemptive in nature. Is there damnation in judgment in the doctrine of election and predestination? Yes. Sometimes hard sinful hearts are made harder by God and sometimes people are passed over but at the heart of this doctrine of election and predestination is the redemptive purposes of God.

It is very clear from the text that Paul that God willed the rejection of the Jews so that Gentiles might be saved and that he willed the salvation of the Gentiles so that one day the Jews would grow envious and embrace Jesus as Messiah. Paul ends his presentation of God's gospel by saying "all Israel will be saved." We need to remember that the ultimate purpose of this doctrine is the redemptive purposes of God, not damnation.

Second, we should exhibit humility and gratitude for our election and predestination unto salvation in Jesus the Messiah. Because God in his mercy and grace has **"chosen us for salvation from before the creation of the world"** (Eph. 1:4) we should be humbled. Who am I that God would choose me for salvation? This is grace that I do not deserve and had not God chosen me I would have remained lost and never chosen him.

Paul says in the text to his Gentile readers that because some branches were broken off (Jew's who did not believe) they are wild olive shoots (Gentiles) who have been grafted into the root of the olive tree (Israel). Remember Gentiles, **"You do not support the root, but the root supports you"** (11:18) so **"Don't be arrogant"** (11:20) but exhibit gratitude and humility for your salvation.

Third, in face of election and predestination we should desire that all men be saved.

I have a saying, "You should believe like a Calvinist, preach like an Arminian, and love like a Universalist."

At this present moment I can only think of a few people who I do not want to make it to heaven under any circumstances. When I see those Jihadi John and the ISIS soldiers beheading the 21 Coptic Christians on the beach in Libya or burning alive the Syrian fighter pilot any doubts I have ever had about the existence of hell (which are few and far between) go out the window. I would be deeply disappointed if an eternal hell did not exist, but for the most part I want all men to be saved.

So as I think about God's purposes in election and predestination, salvation and damnation, I want to have the same heart Paul had when he thought about his own people's rejection of Jesus as Messiah. Paul said in Romans 9 that he had **"unceasing anguish in his heart (over his people's rejection of the gospel) and that if he himself could be accursed and cut off from Christ for salvation of his people he would do it."** (v.1) He also said the beginning of chapter 10 that it was **"his heart's desire that the Israelites would be saved,"** (v.1) and he said in chapter 11 that he hoped to **"arouse his own people to envy and save some of them."** (v.13) God is sovereign over salvation, damnation is real, but we should have big hearts when it comes to what we desire for the salvation of others. This is biblical.

Fourth, Israel matters. I saw on the news last night that a 93 year old German man, Oscar Groning, is on trial for war crimes committed against the Jews during WWII. This man did not gas them but his job was to collect money from the Jews as they were escorted off the trains into the prison gas chambers. In his testimony he has acknowledged his moral complicity and guilt for remaining silent in the face of such an atrocity. Based off what I read I believe he is sincere and think he should be shown mercy and I think that's what he will get, but none-the-less, it reminds us of how there is still a living link to a nation that almost wiped the Jews off the face of the earth.

I think we are in those times again and I also think a lot of people are asleep and naive about these things. As Christians we are not the root we are the wild olive branch who has been grafted into the root and we should not forget the root from which we come. Is Israel perfect? Are people sinners? But she does have a right to exist as a nation right where she is. It is the only democracy in the Middle East and it is the freest of all those nations in that part of the world. She is still the apple of God's eye and we should not abandon her and we must come to her defense in this very dangerous time. As individual Christians let us pray for Israel and at least have the courage to speak on her behalf in the face of the holocaust threats being made against her today.

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