

God and the Future Romans 11:13-15

We have seen in this chapter that God has not cast away Israel but has chosen to save a remnant of the nation as he has done in the past. But in God's providence, the vast majority of the nation that rejected Christ did not do so just for the sake of stumbling but in order that salvation would come to the Gentiles or the non-Jews. We are here today because that very gospel has gone out into all the world, and it is one of the surprising purposes of God that you can see in the rejection by Israel in that gospel. But not only that, but through the riches of God's grace that will be given to the Gentiles, God will provoke Israel to want that very salvation. And there is coming a time of great Jewish salvation.

And as we come to this passage there are a couple of things that we have to hold in mind. One is that God really does hold and control the future. We still have a hard time with that truth. I do not think there is one of us who would deny that truth, but we live and fret and fuss as if we were in control, as if all of life depended ultimately on what we accomplished and did, as if we were really the ultimate pilot of our lives. Or we think that our lives are control by others - politicians or our bosses or someone else significant. Think of all the fretting that we do every single day and every single week, and most of it is over the things that we cannot control. We cannot control whether our children will ultimately come to Christ, or whether our jobs will be there tomorrow, or whether we will or will not contract some life debilitating disease, or whether someone ultimately likes you or hates you, or when Covid will end. Think of what worry is. It is our craving and delusion that we are in control or that we should be in control. From chapters 9-11 the message is that there is another in control. Do we recognize that message? How much worry is in our life and how often are we resting in his control?

Another message that comes through this passage is that of arrogance and pride. It is so apparent that the thing that kept the Jews from coming to Christ is arrogance and pride. They thought they could keep the Law or enough of that Law to make themselves righteous in God's sight. In their pride they believe what all self-righteous sinners believe, and that is that we are better than we really are. We are sinners, all of us who have fallen so woefully short. Theologians have a term to describe our spiritual condition as polluted with sin. And the main message is that every aspect of our being is tainted by sin. Spurgeon used the analogy, **"As the salt flavors every drop in the Atlantic, so does sin affect every atom of our nature. It is so sadly there, so abundantly there, that if you cannot detect it, you are deceived."** And that is exactly what the Jews did.

But here is where we go astray is that we can be guilty of the same sin as the Jews. We think that we are different than unbelieving Israel, somehow morally superior. They are the worst of sinners. This led right after the first century to a rise of anti-Semitism that has continued on among believers. Some cannot even see how God could take his program up with the Jews again. And God's rejection of Israel doesn't mean that they were worst sinners than us, and his acceptance of us does not mean that we were any better than them. If we come to that conclusion we miss the whole message of the Gospel and that is salvation is by God's grace alone. God has his purposes of why he has constructed the universe the way that he has and keeping

these things clear in our hearts and mind helps us not only preach the gospel to people irregardless who they are but also helps us have that gospel burden for the lost irregardless of who they are. Let's be honest, it is so easy to give up on those around us, or to look at individuals hardness of heart and think they are beyond the power of God to convert them and apply the grace of Christ to their lives. So this morning I want us to see two points, as we look at God's grace to the nation of Israel, and that is I want us to see Paul's burden, and then the reason for that burden.

1. We need to see the burden of ministry. Vv. 13-14.

It is amazing to look at the nature of ministry, because ministry means to rank ourselves under others in order to serve them in some capacity. We have servants in restaurants or in retail stores or taxi drivers or we serve our bosses or supervisors at work. And this is what ministry is - the ability to rank yourself under others and serve them for their benefit and welfare. And we realize that what God has entrusted us with is a gospel ministry. And the amazing thing about this ministry is that for many there are things that are below individuals to do. It is almost like people exist for their benefit or stature rather than the other way around, that for the glory of God we exist for others. And as believers we should be consumed with serving others that they might be blessed and know Christ. If you love God then it will cause you to love others, even people you would not naturally love, and want to serve them and nothing would be below you in that service. No sacrifice is too great or too small.

Paul had a burden for ministry, and a burden for Gentiles and Jews alike. Look at verse 13, **"Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry."** He is addressing the non-Jewish believers in Rome in case they begin to look down on the minority of Jewish believers in that congregation. And he speaks of his own ministry. His primary calling was to the Gentile people. Listen to Eph.3:8, **"To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."** Notice what this ministry is called, "this grace was given." This is an undeserved and unmerited and even before he came to Christian unwanted ministry. Paul, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, wanted nothing to do with the Gentiles, but now through the new birth and the calling of God he has been given this grace. That is what ministry is - it is something that none of us deserve. It is a grace gift of God.

And that is why he even says here, "I magnify my ministry." The word "magnify" means to glory or to extol in. It is something that you are excited about and believe in so you put your whole heart into. And the reason why was given in Eph. 3:8 in what he did among the Gentiles, "to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." You see that word "riches" used in the previous couple of verses. This is what ministry is all about - the glory of magnifying Christ. The strength of ministry is the riches of Christ that we get to make known. Certainly we do that in tangible ways through the maintenance of the building, through nursery, or whatever. We do things with our hands for the glory of God. And we also have lips and voices where we need to serve others. We need to serve them by verbalizing the unsearchable riches of Christ. And through all of this we need to realize that this is a grace gift that God has given us. None of us deserve to do anything in his name, and yet he has graced us. So often in ministry we

can start and be amazed at God's grace in letting us do anything in his name, but after a while start to complain about the hassles and the effort that is needed. And I am going to assume you are involved in the lives of others some way and some how, and ask the question: do you still glory in this immense gift of God's grace in ministering to others, to be involved in making Christ known, loved and cherished? This is one work with eternal fruit that will continue on for all of eternity.

But that ministry that is centred on God and his grace and truly wants him to be worshiped and adored will cause us to care deeply and passionately for others. And Paul cared and loved those Gentile believers that he ministered to, but he never forgot his own Jewish brethren according to the flesh. Look at verse 14, "**in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.**" Paul wants his Gentile audience to be aware that one of his goals in preaching Christ among the Gentiles is to arouse jealousy among the Jews so that some would be saved. And we saw that in 10:19 where Paul quoted Deut.32:21 that God would bless the Gentiles and make the Jews envious while they were receiving judgment from God. And no doubt Paul is encouraged by the divine strategy of God, and therefore is even more vigorous in his efforts. And here is the outcome - God will save some.

And why do we put effort into ministry? Why do we put our heart and soul and sweat and tears into serving others by making Christ known? We certainly love God, but that love for God should always lead to a love for others. It should always cause us to be burdened for others, just as Paul is burdened for his fellow countrymen. And in that burden we should take great comfort that as God causes some of his fellow countrymen to want the same blessings of Christ, God has chosen another strategy to save some and that is through ministry, through the propagation and teaching and proclaiming of the gospel. And it is that belief that he can take the hardest heart, or the most indifferent and uninterested heart, and give them life to hear that message and respond. Ministry is about loving God and loving others, and trusting God that his eternal purposes really will be worked out by what we do.

2. Our trust is in God who will bring his purposes to pass. V. 15-16.

One of the things that is so surprising is the other-worldly promises that are given to us through the Scriptures. These promises are so incredible and fantastic that many times we in our own minds cannot see how the Lord could ever bring them about. Such as the resurrection of every believer that has ever lived, even people like the apostle Paul that has been dead for two thousand years. Or the promise of the coming thousand year kingdom where Jesus Christ will reign and there will be a reverse of much of the curse, and there will be a time of great salvation, and that will spill over to the eternal state where death will be no more and there will be no sin. How can God accomplish these things? And we have another one of those truths and that is God will give life to Israel once again, and there is going to be this massive salvation throughout the nation. And it seems impossible when you think of the hatred that they have for Christ. How can God ever accomplish this? But we ask the same question of our unsaved neighbour or co-worker who hates Christ, and yet God is able to do far more abundantly what we ask or think. He will bring his purposes to pass.

So look at what Paul says here, "**For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the**

dead?” Now look at that word “rejection.” This seems to contradict what Paul said in the opening verses that God has not rejected Israel, but we realize what he is talking about is a temporary rejection of Israel. And again, look at the outcome of that rejection - “the reconciliation of the world.” I don’t know how many times in the book of Acts we see the gospel preached to the Jews, they reject what Paul and the other missionaries said, so the gospel goes out to others - to the world, and they are reconciled to God. And by the end of the first century Christianity has so expanded throughout the known world that it could never be obliterated.

And that is a great message and we see the unalterable plan of God in that statement. But that is not Paul’s main point. But Paul’s whole point in the future of Israel in the second half of the verse. Look at what Paul says here, “**what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead.**” If this much glory and salvation was brought through their rejection then how much more with their acceptance of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. Think about the logic here: if a faithless Israel could bring salvation to the many in the world, how much more of a greater blessing to the world will be a faithful Israel. And look at what it will be: “life from the dead.” That is the way we describe salvation - we were dead in trespasses in sins, but as Eph. 2:4-5 says, “**But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-by grace you have been saved.**” And this is not only talking about a spiritual resurrection of individuals inside of Israel but also the resurrection or rebirth of the nation that loves Christ and trusts in him and follows him. And it will be a blessing to the whole world. Listen to Isaiah 62:1-4, “**For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married.**” This again is an amazing passage in light of where Israel is today.

God will bring salvation and the nations shall stream to Jerusalem to honour and praise the great king. Now to prove what he has just said that there is going to be this restoration of the nation before God we have verse 16, “**If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.**” Now let me say that the first time I read this verse I did not understand it because I found the terminology a bit foreign. What does “dough” and “branches” have to do with the restoration of Israel and the plan of God? And this is where you have to understand that this is talking about Israel, and what Paul is using is Old Testament terminology to apply the truth that God is not done with Israel, which is a hotly debated theological topic today even if you do not realize whether it is or not.

So look at the first illustration, “**If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump.**” Before we can see what this is alluding to we have to understand what it means. We realize the word “first fruits” is talking about an offering, and what

they are offering up is dough. So we have to ask is where in the Old Testament do they offer a first fruit of dough? We are familiar with many of the animal sacrifices. But listen to Numbers 15:19-21, **“and when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall present a contribution to the LORD. Of the first of your dough you shall present a loaf as a contribution; like a contribution from the threshing floor, so shall you present it. Some of the first of your dough you shall give to the LORD as a contribution throughout your generations.”** Now the dough or cakes were taken from the grain of the land, and there was a portion of it that was given to the Lord, and a portion of that was placed on the alter and burned up as an offering to God. And the rest of the cake or dough were given to the priests to take home and eat. And although the first fruit of that dough was presented to God, the whole of that lump was set aside for the Lord’s use and purposes. It was consecrated to him.

And here is Paul’s whole purpose, it is not that Israel is holy or righteous before him. That is the way we use the word holy so often. But what it means is that the nation is consecrated or set aside for him. He made that pledge to the patriarchs - Abraham, Issac, and Jacob - that they are his people, and he will not go back on that promise.

Now going through that explanation the second illustration is a little easier, “if the root is holy, so are the branches.” The root system, such as the promises given to Abraham, Issac, and Jacob are foundational, then God’s plan and promises given to Israel will come to pass. He will take up his program with him. And based on what Paul says here, listen to what John MacArthur says, **“In order to be faithful to His own Word, the Lord must provide a future salvation for Israel. Israel has not yet completely fulfilled God’s promise to redeem and restore Abraham’s descendants. If the root, Abraham and the other patriarchs, is holy, then the branches, their descendants, are holy too. They are divinely called and set apart before the foundation of the world and God’s work with those branches will not be complete until they bear the spiritual fruit He intends to produce in and through them, until the end of the age when they actually become the holy people they were destined to be.”**

Going through this chapter I do not see how anyone could ever say that God has cast off Israel forever. There is a future. God is true to his word and the future, like all those who are believers is more glorious than we could have ever imagined. He can be trusted.