Surprising Purposes of God
Romans 11:11-12

One of the things that surprises me is the wonderful plan of God, and although I struggle with that plan, and even why certain events take place in my own life, I am always amazed at his purposes. I find them surprising. I find that God is so unlike me in the way he has constructed the universe, and the way he controls things and causes everything to come to pass both the good and the bad in my life. I am still amazed at the truth of Romans 8:28, "**And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose**." When he says "all things" in that passage it means that he controls all things, and they are all work together for my good and his glory.

And we can see that in Joseph's life in the Book of Genesis. Everything in his life starts off exciting. At the age of seventeen he is given revelatory dreams that he is going to rule over his brothers and his father, but then he is sold into slavery by those very brothers, accused of rape by his master's wife, thrown into prison, and then forgotten in prison. This is not the way we would have written the story. If we were Joseph, we would not have written our lives that way especially after the promise of God. But suddenly after Pharaoh in Egypt has revelatory dreams that none can interpret, the cup bearer remembers Joseph, and he is brought forward, interprets the dreams and is raised to second in command. And then after 22 years his brothers appear, not knowing Joseph now, and bow themselves before him, they bring to pass the prophecy. It is incredible that all the bad and evil events that took place to bring to pass God's intention, and yet he is never the author of evil. And we have those words in Gen. 50:20 to his brothers, "**As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today**." God meant it for good. And all the free decisions that had to be made by thousands and thousands of people to bring Joseph to that place is just extraordinary, and God controls them all, and yet man is responsible and accountable in all the decisions he makes - you meant evil - God meant it for good - describes the same act.

You see this at the cross of Christ. Acts 4:27-28 says, "**for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.**" Individuals such as Herod, Pilate, and the Romans and Jews were all gather against Christ, not for him, but wanted the termination of this man for their own wicked and evil purposes. But listen to what they do, "whatever you hand and plan had predestined to take place." Amazing again isn't it? The greatest evil of man can bring the greatest good to man, and all of this according to God's plan.

And the reason why I bring this up is because we have another one of those surprising purposes of God that we never would have expected if we did not read it in the Word of God. We never would have expected God to operate in this fashion. We see the good and gracious purposes of God. We have seen through the opening 10 verses of this chapter that God is not finished with Israel. We have seen that He is still to this very day saving a remnant out of Israel just as he has done in the past. And the

way that he does that is through his sovereign grace and choosing. They come freely and believe on him. But the rest that he passes over, which happens to be the majority of Israel harden their hearts. And we saw last time that God judicially hardens the hearts of those who have rejected the clear light of Jesus Christ that he has given to the nation of Israel. But is that all he is doing? Is that his only purpose? Is he now finished with Israel? And the answer that Paul gives is a very strong no.

And this passage is important because we are all living in this fallen world with so many difficulties, where our present struggles do not seem to make sense with our standing and relationship with all-mighty God. We feel more like Joseph in prison then on the throne. But God was as much in control when Joseph was in prison as he was when Joseph was on the throne. And he had Joseph where he wanted him at each time in his life. God has his good purposes. And even in the midst of the judgment of the Jews in hardening them, God has his good purposes, which are glorious and grand and cause us to glorify Him. And I want us to look at the unspeakable and glorious wisdom of God in hardening Israel in two ways.

1. The first is to bring abundant salvation to the Gentiles. V.11a.

One of the amazing things about God is that he can plan and decree certain events to take place that are evil but never be culpable for that evil because the people who did that evil did it freely and did it wanting their own agenda, but God has his own good ends and purposes in mind. And what looks like a curse and is a definite and deserved curse on some, becomes the way and means of the blessing of God in our lives. That is why we have to look at all of life, not through our circumstances but through the lens of Scripture. We so often want to emphasize that God is sovereign but we can never lose the truth of why that is such good news, and that is because He is good, and can be nothing but good. He is unlike the wickedness and evil of man. Just like Jospeh said to his brothers, “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.” God’s good purposes will always come to pass.

So look at what Paul says here, “**So I ask you did they stumble in order that they might fall?**” So God puts the stumbling stone before them and that happens to be the glorious grace found in Christ, and they stumble over that stone. God hardens them in their sin. And now he asks the question, did they stumble or were they harden by God just so they might fall? And the meaning here is that God has cast them away; they have fallen away from him and he will have nothing to do with the Jews again. “In order that” is talking about a purpose. Is God done with them? And look at the answer Paul gives, “**By no means.**” This is the phrase that Paul has used repeatedly throughout this epistle as a strong denunciation. It means perish the thought or never come to this conclusion. And we will talk about it in a few moment, but what that means is that God is not finished with the Jews as a people or Israel as a nation.

So what do we have this hardening of Israel? Certainly as a judgment for the rejection of Jesus, but look at what the texts says, “**Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles.**” God’s purpose of Jewish unbelief and hardening is the salvation of Gentile people. We see this in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants in Matt. 21 where he sends messenger after messenger and they reject them, and then the land owner sends his son and they kill the son, and Jesus comes to this

conclusion about the nation in verse 43, "**Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.**" The kingdom will be taken away but be given to a people who are not God's people, who are the Gentiles. After Jesus sees the faith of the Gentile centurion in Matt. 8 he says in verses 11-12, "**I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**" There will be judgment here, but over there in the east and west there will be abundant salvation.

And you see this play out all the way through the Book of Acts. Time and time again, the Jews reject the gospel, and then the gospel is taken to the Gentiles where you have this great response. An example is in Pisidian Antioch. Listen to Acts 13:46-49, "**And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.**" So God is not caught off guard by the Jewish rejection but has planned this rejection to lead to salvation to the Gentiles.

And think how this took place, because it was not just that the Jews rejected Christ but they were hostile to that message. You see that with the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. But what happens in the midst of that persecution and opposition is something amazing. Listen to Acts 8:1, "**And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.**" And what happened? Believers were scattered, and as they were scattered what message did they take? The message of the gospel, far and wide. God was causing this persecution for the sake of gospel propagation to the nations. Listen to Acts 1:8, the words of the Lord Jesus, "**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**" This didn't come to pass through human ingenuity or human will, but according to the sovereign plan of God by Jewish unbelief and hardening. What came to pass was the very will of God. His good purposes for the Gentile nations, and to cause a plethora or multitude to come to him came through this rejection and persecution of the Jews - and God ordained it all.

Now if that does not cause you to praise God, and be blown away by his wisdom I do not know what will. This is the unfathomable wisdom of God being worked out in human history. Revel in this God, trust in Him no matter what hat happens to be in your life. He is sovereign and He is good! But the glory of that wisdom even becomes more amazing.

2. God's wisdom and glory in the restoration of Israel. Vv. 11b-12.

We realize that all exists for the glory and fame of God because he alone is worthy of all praise and adoration. And I think that is easy for us as believers to agree upon. And the display of his grace is not linear, but is always greater and greater. So during this current age, the grace of God going out to all nations and peoples is greater than the remnant that was saved in Israel through the Old Testament times. We see the gospel going out to places and people in our world that we never thought it would. We see it penetrate places even like North Korea or China that have been closed to Christianity. And this magnifies God's grace and glory. But if that is true, this is the excitement for us as believers, his glory and grace will only shine that much more glorious in the ages to come. And this is what we see in this text before us. Again, it is evident that God is not through with the nation or the people of Israel yet, and what he will do is beyond our minds and hearts to grasp, and it will cause all of us to glory and exult and be overwhelmed with his wisdom and grace.

Look at what this text says first of all at the end of verse 11, "**so as to make Israel jealous.**" Now notice again, this is a purpose statement, "so as." It is the purpose of God. So Israel rejects Jesus Christ, and God in judgment hardens their heart, and the result of that is God bringing myriads of Gentiles to Christ, which in turn God causes the Jews to be jealous. Now what are they jealous of? And the answer here I don't think is negative but positive. Usually when we discuss jealousy we discuss it as a negative attribute, but we also realize that God in his perfections is a jealous God. Here the Jews are jealous of the relationship that Gentile believers have with God. It is evident that they know the God of their Scriptures. And that jealousy throughout this age has led many to come to Christ. And it really teaches us the importance of living for Christ, that God can use how we function, forgive and love one another as a body to impact those around us. Here the mighty change of Gentiles who were pagans and idolaters and atheists and materialist, and how they worship and love God provokes this response of wanting that relationship with the Christ.

And although we see that jealousy leads individually to many coming to Christ both Jews and Gentiles, Israel as a whole will one day come to him. Look at verse 12 here, "**Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!**" The "trespass" here is their rejection of Christ, and their rejection of the offer of the kingdom, this was a great offence in God's sight, a great sin. But look at where it led or what it produced, "riches for the world," and "riches for the Gentiles." We see myriads and myriads, numbers past finding out before the throne of God from every tribe, tongue and people. And they have all been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and we have this wealth of salvation - that is what God produced through their transgression. They meant evil but God meant it for good. But look as he continues, "how much more will their full inclusion mean!" The meaning of "full inclusion" is that there is going to an abundant of salvation for Israel. God's grace is going to be poured out on the nation. You can see that a little later in this chapter in verses 25-26, "**Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, 'The**

Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob'" All of Israel will be saved. He will banish and rid all of ungodliness from the nation of Israel.

But I want us to follow the argument of Paul, because it is really from the lesser to the greater. If God used Israel's disobedience to produce this much riches of his glory, and this abundant of salvation, then how much more will he do when he restores the nation to himself? How much more will that glory and grace emanate out when Israel as a whole are included in with the people of God, when he saves the nation and the people in that nation? There will be so much more blessing and grace through Israel's faith, and the one who causes it will be God. Listen to Zech. 12:10, ""**And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.**" They will see Christ and come to Christ.

The king will rule with his people, and all will come to worship the king in Jerusalem. And what is this indicating for us as believers? And there is an easy application: God is sovereign and he is good. And he does not just hold may past, and directed my past steps, but he holds the future. And if everything bad works for my good and his glory, imagine the day when everything that exists is good, and everything good works for my good and his glory. There is greater glory and grace to come, and God is powerful enough to direct all of human history to that end which includes all the details of your life and my life. And one day we will see that greater outpouring of grace, and we will magnify God. God has got us where he wants, even with all the drama, disappointment and agony that we are presently living with. God is in control. And he will bring his good purposes, and when we finally are with him, those good and grand purposes will be so much more evident, that all we can do is fall before him, and that falling before him will never become old.

Let me end with these words from John Piper, "**It may seem to us a very roundabout way to bring mercy to Israel and the nations. But we are not God. He knows what kind of history must take place to reveal the fullness of his wisdom and his mercy against the backdrop of his justice and wrath. The effect this should have on us, I believe is to keep us faithful and patient, even when it looks as though unbelief has the upper hand. God is in control-unfathomably, unsearchably. And everything will work for mercy to those who trust the Christ.**"