

The Unchanging Nature of God's Purpose

Romans 11: 23 – 29

- In Romans 9 – 11, Paul has been speaking to a predominately Gentile church about what has happened with the Jews, and these verses are the conclusion of that discussion. A discussion that Paul prompted by asking questions like:

Romans 11: 1 I ask, then, has God rejected his people?

- Do you remember Paul's answer? By no means!
- Paul then gives us some evidence to prove this, starting with the fact that he is a Jew and God has saved him. But then Paul goes on to speak about how God has been at work saving a remnant of Jews, from the days of Elijah, right up to the present. In fact, at the time Paul wrote this, it was actually a pretty sizeable remnant of Jews that has been saved since the Day of Pentecost.

Acts 21: 20 And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed.

- God hadn't forgotten Israel; thousands had come to faith in Christ.
- But throughout the book of Acts a major shift has taken place. The first 9 chapters of Acts are filled with stories of Jewish evangelism and salvation, but the remaining 19 chapters are all about the evangelism and salvation of the Gentiles. After that initial conversion of the Jews, was God done with them once and for all?
 - After all, what Stephen said about them, in Acts 7, was certainly true:

Acts 7: 51 – 52 "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. ⁵²Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered."

- Just think what happened to Jesus, the Righteous One. A week before Palm Sunday, Jesus raised a man named Lazarus from the dead—a miracle of miracles. It is why a week later, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the crowds lined the streets of Jerusalem, and hailed Jesus as their king—treating him as a conquering hero. 6 days later, the same crowd shouted "Crucify him!"
 - How fickle is the human heart? How easily swayed and influenced. Surely after the Jews had murdered God's own Son, God was done with them. And in a sense, we could say He was. In fact, in the week, between Palm Sunday and Good Friday, Jesus spoke about the end of Jerusalem to his disciples.

Luke 21: 5 – 6 while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, Jesus said, ⁶"As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

Luke 21: 20 – 22 when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²²for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.

- In 70 AD, about 40 years after Jesus spoke these words, the Romans finally had enough of Jewish unrest and rebellion, and they moved with brutal force against Jerusalem. As was typically the case, as the Romans

began their assault, people fled to the city, and the historian Josephus tells us that as a result 1.1 million Jews were slaughtered when Jerusalem fell. The city and the Temple were utterly destroyed.

- But Christians did the opposite of the norm. Why? Because just as Jesus had told them to do, rather than running to the city, they ran to the hills and were preserved.
- Within one generation of Jesus' death, the Jewish age came to an end. Was this the final breaking of the branches from the Olive Tree that Paul was speaking of in Romans 11?

Romans 11: 23 – 29 And even (The Jews), if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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"; ²⁷ "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins." ²⁸ As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

- Although not all commentators agree with what the phrase "all Israel will be saved" means, based on a straightforward reading of the text, it seems to mean, God is not yet done with Israel.
 - Yes, God has judged them, and severely disciplined them because they rejected and killed His Son, but God is not finished with them yet.
- Why? I don't know. I certainly would be. But here is the problem with that.
 - Last week, I spoke about how wrong it is for us to hail Jesus as King with our lips on Sunday morning and then go out on Monday and deny him with our lives. How is what we do really any different than what the Jews did in that week between Palm Sunday and Good Friday? It might be a difference of degrees but is it really that different?
 - I have denied Jesus, like Peter. Just like Judas, I have betrayed Jesus by going my own way. Whenever I go my own way, I am rebelling against Jesus as Lord. Rebelling against the very thing that I have proclaimed him to be in my life. How is that not a betrayal? It wasn't just the Jews who put Jesus on the cross. It was my sin.
 - If I am honest, I deserved to be a broken off branch that is thrown into the fire and burned. It is only by the grace of God that I am what I am, and if God can take a wild olive shoot like me and graft me into His tree, He can also take a broken off natural branch from the tree and graft it back in again, giving it life.
- That is what Paul is telling us here. It is one of the primary lessons he wants the Gentile Church to see in all of this. Listen to his warnings to us:

Romans 11: 25 Lest you be wise in your own sight,

Romans 11: 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches

Romans 11: 20 do not become proud, but fear.

- Don't look down on the branches that have been broken off. Don't look down on those apart from the tree, because at one time just like them, you:

Ephesians 2: 3 – 5 once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

- You are not part of the tree because you are smarter, cleverer, better, than others. You didn't graft yourself into the tree. You were dead, an object of God's wrath, but in His mercy and love, God grafted you in, and gave you life.
- By the grace of God, you are what you are, and if God's grace could reach to you and me who are dead in our sins, it can reach to anyone. It can take dried out withered branches and graft them in and give them life.
- God pictured what Paul is writing about here, through the prophet Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 37: 1 – 10 The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ² And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." ⁵ Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord." ⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

- Ezekiel was a prophet to Israel during their exile to Babylon in 580 BC. Most nations when they are destroyed by another and conquered cease to exist, but God is clearly telling Ezekiel that will not be the case with Israel.
 - They look dead. In fact, they have been dead, so dead they are nothing more than sun bleached bones, but God who is rich in mercy will make them live again. How? It's right there in Ezekiel's vision.

Ezekiel 37: 4, 9 "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord...." "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live."

- The preaching of the word and power of the Holy Spirit. That's what brings the dead to life. The vision Ezekiel had 600 years earlier is what Paul is writing about here. God taking cut off dried up Jewish branches and regrafting them into the tree to give both them and the tree life to the full.

"What is not done in nature, and cannot be affected by the power of man, will be done by God with whom all things are possible. He is able to make dry bones live, and to restore the severed branches of the Jewish nation." Robert Haldane



Think what Paul has been teaching us here in Romans 11. The Jewish stumble, that is, their rejection of Jesus the Messiah has resulted in the door being opened for the Gentiles to be grafted into the tree. Because the Jews rejected the Gospel, the Gospel went out to the Gentiles. But look what Paul writes in verse 15.

Romans 11: 15 For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?

- It seems to point to a time when the Jews will come to faith and accept the Messiah that they had rejected. Paul first mentioned this possibility in:

Romans 11: 12 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!

- Then in verse 24, he speaks of it as a probability, rather than just a possibility.

Romans 11: 24 how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

- And then as we come to verse 26. Paul speaks of the Jewish regrafting, their coming to salvation, as a prophetic certainty.

Romans 11: 26 And in this way all Israel will be saved.

1. Let's start with what Paul means by the phrase, "All Israel will be saved."

Romans 11: 25 – 26 a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; ²⁷ "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

- There is a lot of division on what this phrase "all Israel will be saved" means, and if you see it differently than I do, that's ok. It really doesn't change anything. God is going to do what he is going to do, whether we understand it or not.
- The bottom line message that I take from all of this is that we must do all we can to evangelize Gentile and Jew alike, so that all the fullness comes into the Kingdom, because then the way will be ready for our Jesus to return, as King, and

Revelation 21: 3 – 5 the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

- Don't you long for that day to come, a day of no more senseless violence, a day when sickness, death and sadness are gone forever? If so, then evangelize, so this fullness comes into the Kingdom, and our King returns.
- It's always interesting when you find yourself disagreeing with John Calvin, but I do here. Calvin took this phrase "all Israel" to mean all of God's elect, both Jew and Gentile. So, in other words, he thought Paul was speaking of Israel here in a spiritual sense rather than as a people group.
 - But, everywhere else in chapters 9, 10, and 11, as Paul speaks about Israel, he speaks in terms of an ethnic people group, the Jews. So, I say this with great humility, fear, and trepidation, I don't think Calvin's take on this is quite right. I think Paul here is speaking of all of ethnic Israel being saved.



- Others take all Israel to mean that just as God has been working in the past to save a remnant of Israel, He will continue to work throughout history to save a remnant, and the phrase “all Israel” simply points to the day when all who are part of the remnant will be saved. But look what Paul says:

Romans 11: 25 – 26 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. ²⁶And in this way all Israel will be saved,

- God saving a remnant is no great mystery. It’s no big secret. It was happening throughout Paul’s day. Remember the verse we looked at earlier from Acts 21 that spoke of the thousands of Jews who had been saved. That was unfolding right before their eyes, there is no mystery to that.
- No, along with many other commentators, I take what Paul writes to mean that a day is coming in which there will be a mass conversion of ethnic Jewish people to Christianity. In many ways Paul is saying the same thing he said in:

Romans 11: 12 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!

- It appears that Paul is indeed pointing to a day when a full compliment of the Jewish nation will come to see and receive Jesus as their savior, Messiah, King. Full inclusion doesn’t sound like a remnant. No, it conveys the idea of a majority.
 - The word all here doesn’t mean that every Jew will come to Christ, but rather so many will come to Christ, that Israel will be seen as a Christian nation.
 - Remember when America was seen that way? Not every American was a Christian, but many were, so many that Christian values and morality were the values and the morality of the culture.
 - That is what I think Paul is pointing us to with these prophetic words. A day is coming when the Gospel and the Spirit will go out in power in Israel and bring many Jews to salvation. How? The same way it happens with the Gentiles. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Paul makes that clear in:

Romans 11: 26 – 27 “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; ²⁷“and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

- There is one tree. There is one salvation.

Acts 4: 12 Salvation is found in no one else (but Jesus), for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

- Jesus is the deliverer that came out of Zion. Through his death on the cross, Jesus banished ungodliness, and took away our sins, and the sins of the Jews. There is just:

Ephesians 4: 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism

- Whatever this phrase, “All of Israel will be saved” means, salvation will come through Jesus, through the preaching of the Gospel and the power of the Spirit.

2. When will we see Israel bend her knee to her Messiah?

- Paul gives us a definitive answer.

Romans 11: 25 a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.



Previously we spoke about this idea of the fullness of the Gentiles, and I'll remind you that I think the best way to think about this is in terms of a saturation point.

- There will come a time, some day in the future when the Gospel will have reached all the Gentiles that it is going to reach.

Matthew 24: 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

- The whole world includes the Jews. The way Paul describes things here, the Gospel will go out to all the Gentiles, so that all elect Gentiles are saved. Once all the dry bones of the Gentiles have been brought to life, God will then, through the Gospel, also bring the dried-out bones of the Jews back to life.
- That is why Paul refers to what has happened with Israel as a partial hardening. He doesn't mean that in the sense that they are semi-hardened. He means it in the sense that the hardening is not permanent. God can take the hardest heart and make it soft. Right before Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones, God said this to and through Ezekiel to the people of Israel.

Ezekiel 36: 24 -28 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

- A heart of stone is as hard of a heart as you can get. Dead bones are dead. It's not a partial death, a partial hardening as in almost hard or almost dead. They are dead, they are as hard as can be, but not forever. Because after God has brought life to all His elect Gentiles, He will bring life to all of elect Israel.

3. Why will God do this?

Romans 11: 28 As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.

- Right now, Israel, the Jews, sit under God's judgment because they rejected and killed his Son, their Messiah. Because they stand in opposition to God's Messiah, they stand opposed to God. They are, therefore, in this moment, enemies of God.
 - Notice again that Paul emphasizes that this falling out has benefited the Gentiles. Because Israel rejected the Gospel, because their branches were broken off the tree, room was made for the Gentiles to receive the Gospel and to be grafted in. That is what Paul means by enemies for your sake. They are temporary enemies of God, but they are loved. Why? For the sake of their forefathers, most particularly Abraham.
 - Listen again to the covenant promise God made to Abraham.

Genesis 17: 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

- Even though Israel has been an enemy of the Gospel, they are still God's beloved. Why? For the sake of Abraham. More specifically for the sake of

the promise God made to Abraham. God promised that He would be God to Abraham's offspring. It was an unconditional promise meaning that God alone would make it happen.

Romans 11: 16 (Because Abraham) the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and (because Abraham) the root is holy, so are the branches.

- Two thousand years before Jesus was born, God loved Abraham and called Abraham to himself, promising to be God to Abraham and his offspring after him. God would continue to love the offspring of Abraham, and continue to call them, because God keeps His promises even when we don't.
 - Throughout the ages God has been calling a remnant to himself, in the future it will be the fullness of Israel. In fact, this is exactly what Paul points us to in:

Romans 11: 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

- Irrevocable means that they cannot be undone. No matter how unlovable Israel would be, God would still love them for the sake of Abraham, and because of that, even after they killed His Son, God would still work to bring salvation to them.
- The gifts God gave to them, their calling, the covenants, the patriarchs, the law, the prophets are irrevocable, and through His Holy Spirit, God will work through these gifts to accomplish the salvation of Israel.
- The promise God made to Abraham, regarding Abraham's offspring is irrevocable. Listen to how Hebrews explains the irrevocable nature of God's covenant.

Hebrews 6: 17 – 20 So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. ¹⁹ We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf.

- Now think what the writer of Hebrews is telling us in regard to all of this. First, it is impossible for God to lie. It is totally against his nature. But on top of that, God guaranteed what He said with an oath.
- What oath? Go back with me to Genesis 15. As the chapter opens, years have gone with nothing happening. Abraham is having doubts about God's promises.

Genesis 15: 8 "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"

- In response to Abraham's doubts, God cut a covenant with Abraham.

Genesis 15: 9 God said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other.

- What a gruesome sight that must have been but listen what happened next.

Genesis 15: 17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram

- Think how God, years later, would lead Israel out of Egypt. It was as a pillar of fire at night and a cloud of smoke by day.
- In the form of a flaming torch and a smoldering firepot, it was God passing through those gruesome cut up pieces of animal flesh. Why?



- It was how they swore a covenant in Abraham's day. Usually, it would be two walking through the cut up pieces, and as they walked they would be saying to each other, may I be torn in two just as these animals have been if I do not keep these promises I am making.
- Abraham didn't have to walk through, only God did. Even though it was impossible for God to lie, God unilaterally swore an oath to Abraham that God alone would do whatever was necessary to be God to Abraham and his offspring after him.
- Salvation would come to the Jews because God swore by himself that it would.
 - 4000 years later, God would send His Son to fulfill the promise. Jesus knew that is why he came to earth—in order to fulfill the promise God had made to Abraham. Listen to what he told his disciples.

Luke 9: 21 "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

Luke 9: 51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

- In order to keep the promise God made to Abraham, 4000 years after the torch and firepot walked through the cut-up pieces of animal, Jesus walked by himself up Mt Calvary. There:

Isaiah 53: 5 he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

- At the cross, because he bore our sin, Jesus was forsaken and torn asunder from the Father.
- Why did Jesus ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, knowing he would die there? To accomplish God's plan of salvation.

Romans 8: 31 – 32 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

- God didn't send Jesus to die on the cross and then cross His fingers, hoping that someone will take advantage of it. God's plan of redemption was the eternal plan of God, which was perfectly conceived and perfectly executed so that the will of God to save all His people, Gentile and Jew alike, is accomplished through the atoning work of Christ.
- Think about that. This Good Friday week, rejoice in your salvation, that God, in His love and mercy, took your dead, cold, rebellious heart and made you alive again, in Christ. If he can do that for Gentile sinners like you and me, He can do it for anyone. And He will do it, because:

Hebrews 6: 16 – 20 he guaranteed it with an oath, ¹⁸so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. ¹⁹We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf.