

Earlier this week I came down the stairs at our home... and I heard my 4 year-old granddaughter say to me: “*Good morning Grandpa Pig... snort... snort...*” Fortunately the television in our house was in sight... The volume was way low but I could see what it was playing. I recognized a British cartoon that she likes to watch... called “Pepa Pig.” ... So rather than feeling disrespected and insulted by a 4 year-old... I saw her as honoring me by associating me with a fun character that she liked. I laughed and said to her mother: “*Context sure is everything!*”

Last week (with our passage in Romans)... I stressed this very thing: *Context is everything.* ... We are in a section of Romans where there is a wide variety of understandings about what the Apostle Paul wrote. ... And I believe that keeping a close eye on the context... (using it like we would a map)... is a safeguard to minimize the chance of getting off-course... especially as we try to navigate such waters as Romans chapters 9-11. ... So I am going to be very obvious (again) about the context... through our journey today.

The discussion of our current passage... began in Romans 9... following Paul's impressive statement about the believer's eternal security in Christ – which he made in Romans 8. ... Paul (in Romans 8:28-39) assured us that victory for the believer is inescapable. (It is absolutely certain that our salvation cannot be lost.) ... But with that... Paul immediately anticipated an obvious question: *How can we believe in the eternal security of the Christian... if... as we can clearly see... Jews as a whole are not responding to the preaching of the gospel and thus are not being saved? ... Since God has failed with the Jews... we cannot be - **at all** - secure.*

So... throughout Romans chapters 9 and 10... Paul has been proving why we can believe that God did not fail with the Jews (My last two sermons have covered this.)

Now (with chapter 11) Paul begins once more to engage his critics... but on a slightly different tack. ... Paul puts these words in the mouth of a Jewish critic. *'If, as you claim, God's word of promise has not failed, then God must have rejected His people. How else can you explain the pitifully small number of Jews who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah?'*

If Christianity is true... doesn't this mean that God has rejected Israel? If God has rejected Israel... how can we suppose that He will avoid rejecting us as well? ... (Using Chuck Swindoll's wording) –

After all, if God had crumpled up the old covenant and tossed it into the flame, who's to say He wouldn't do the same with His new covenant when it comes to us?

Romans 11:1

“mē genoito” – Paul writes... and I have spoken before that this is one of the strongest ways in the original language of the New Testament to shout *“Absolutely no way!... Impossible... God forbid!!!”* ...I still have fond memories of one of my Greek professors in seminary (Dr. Leonard Hillstrom) vehemently shouting *“mē genoito”* at us... if we got a question wrong. (I may have forgotten a lot of my Greek vocabulary over the years... but somehow... I have not forgotten this phrase.)

Paul's answer (here) is that God is in **no possible way** done with the Jews — there is a future for the Jewish nation. The prophet Jeremiah was also very vehement about this...

Jeremiah 31:37 (ESV)

³⁷ Thus says the LORD: "If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD."

Paul had marinated himself in the Old Testament. ... So we can well understand his horrified and extreme reaction to the suggestion that God might somehow break His promises to Israel... and cast His people off. ... *"Abandon the covenant...? ... Break the promises...? ... How could God do that and still remain God...? ... If that happened... truth... honor... righteousness... and justice would be torn from God's nature... and God would no longer be God. ... "mē genoito!!!"*

If God has cast away His people... then how can the conversion of the Apostle Paul be explained? ... If the seed of Abraham must of necessity be cut off... he must be (*himself*) rejected. ... Paul is using his own case as proof that Israel has not been abandoned. ... As long as there is only one believing Jew (though... in fact... there are many) — no one can affirm that God has rejected Israel *entirely*.

Paul's case is encouraging. He had been the foremost calculating... cruel... bloodthirsty enemy of the Church. He was extremely odious to Christians. ... God had sovereignly hunted him down... thrashed him on the Damascus Road... and brought him kicking and struggling into the Kingdom. ... Paul (a hardened... religious man with blood on his hands)

came to Christ - so there is hope for anyone. ... (LISTEN!) By the authority of the Word of God... we can say that no one is beyond the grace of God. People like Paul are living demonstrations that God is not through with the Jews. What a beautiful gospel to preach!

1 Timothy 1:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

The fact that his conversion is presented three times in the Book of Acts is significant (chapters 9... 22... and 26). ... Certainly Dr. Luke did not write these chapters and repeat the story just to exalt Paul. ... No... they were written to show Paul's conversion as an illustration of the future conversion of the nation of Israel.

The accounts of Paul's conversion bear little-to-no similarity to yours and my salvation experience. ... Certainly none of us has seen Christ in His (literal) blinding glory... or actually heard Him speak from heaven. ... We were neither blinded by the light of heaven... nor thrown to the ground.

But Paul's conversion is "a pattern" for the future conversion of the nation Israel. ... It is a picture of how the nation of Israel will be saved when Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom on earth. (But you are going to have to wait until next week... when I will cover the verses that reveal what Israel's future conversion will be like.)

I will only give you this little preview. ... We will look at Zechariah 12:10... Matthew 23:37-39... and Revelation 12... and see that the nation will call on Jesus for help... recognize Him as their Messiah... and repent. When

they finally call on Him... Christ will return with all of us who have been raptured. ... Jesus will rescue them.... He will put down the Antichrist (who is threatening them... surrounding them in a special place of refuge in the wilderness that God will prepare)... Then Christ will establish His Messianic Kingdom on earth... which Old Testament prophecy often describes.

There will be parallels between the conversion of the Jewish nation and the experience of Saul of Tarsus' conversion. ... Stay tuned for next week's message – about God's future plan with Israel. (I *wanted* to get to it this week... but then I thought it will be better to take some time with it. So I'll save it for next week.)

Romans 11:2-5

Verse two begins: “*God has not rejected the people **whom he foreknew.**” This is incredible! ... (LISTEN!) Before He selected them as His Own people... He knew how sinful they would turn out to be.*

Regardless of Israel's unfaithfulness... *God always keeps His promises.* God chose Israel to be the people through whom all other nations of the world could know Him. Israel didn't have to do anything to be chosen. God had given them this privilege because He wanted to - **not** because they *deserved* special treatment.

Deuteronomy 9:4-6 (ESV)

⁴ “*Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, ‘It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,’ whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you.* ⁵ *Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the*

wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. ⁶ “Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.

God knew beforehand that Israel would be unfaithful. ... If God’s faithfulness to Israel was going to be dependent on their faithfulness... God would never have chosen them in the first place. ... God will remain faithful to His promises to Israel... (and to you and I) despite our failures.

... [P A U S E] ...

In these verses that we just read from Romans (verses 2-5) Paul recalled the experience of Elijah... because it is another very potent story that perfectly illustrates God’s choosing only a few - out of the many (a remnant) - to carry His plan forward.

The concept Paul uses here is "remnant." ... Remnant is not a new concept. This important concept is found there **62** times in the Old Testament. ... “Remnant” refers to a small surviving part of something... either an object... or a custom... or a people. ... Last year... Patti and I went to a flooring store and bought a remnant of carpet.... (a left-over fragment from a huge roll.) We (then) hired someone to make three throw rugs for us.

In the Old Testament “remnant” refers (in most cases) to the small company of Jews who survived or were to survive the invasions... destructions... and captivities inflicted on them by the Assyrians and Babylonians. ... Only a “remnant” returned to the land of Israel... after their

captivity. And several times only a “remnant” would remain faithful to the Lord... as the majority of the nation worshiped the Canaanite gods.

God frequently uses ONLY a “remnant” for His plan – not the majority. Paul illustrates this through Elijah.

Elijah had challenged the priests of Baal to a contest... in which they were to ask Baal to send fire to consume the sacrifice on their altar... while Elijah would ask God to send fire to consume the sacrifice on his. ... When Baal failed... and God answered spectacularly (sending fire to consume not only Elijah's sacrifice... but also the wood... stones... soil... and water in the trench)... the prophet seized his opportunity... and had four hundred prophets and priests of Baal killed. It was a great victory!

But news of it reached Ahab... (the wicked king of Israel)... who told his wife (Jezebel) what Elijah had done. ... She was more wicked even than Ahab... and she swore to have Elijah killed immediately in swift retaliation. Elijah... who was undoubtedly exhausted emotionally by the earlier test of wills... lost confidence in God... and fled on a forty-day journey into the remote wilderness of Sinai.

The next morning God spoke to him. "*What are you doing here, Elijah?*"

Elijah replied in what is surely one of the most pitiful complaints in all Scripture:

1 Kings 19:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”

Uhhh! - Never mind that the Israelites had just responded to his challenge to execute the four hundred prophets and priests of Baal.

But here is what God did. He took care of him. He provided what he needed and encouraged Elijah.

First... God gave Elijah a new vision of Himself. He placed him on the mountain while an impressively great wind... an enormous earthquake... and an intense fire passed by. ... These powerful natural phenomena reflected God's strength and sovereignty... but God was not in them. Instead... after the wind... earthquake... and fire had passed by... God spoke to Elijah - in what is described as "*a gentle whisper*."

God repeated the question: "*What are you doing here, Elijah?*"

Elijah gave the same answer as before. Then God told him to anoint two new kings: Hazael as king of Aram and Jehu as king of Israel. He was also to anoint Elisha to be his own successor as God's prophet. These three (the two kings and Elisha)... would be a strong new team to help him. Then finally... God said:

1 Kings 19:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

[P A U S E] ... *It has always been the case that even in the worst of times a remnant has been saved.* This is the point to which we have come now. It is proved by the fact that even in the dark days of Elijah's ministry... by God's own count and revelation... seven thousand Jews were still faithful to God and had refused to worship Baal.

The same reassurances the Lord gave Elijah can be applied today. ... Israel is not lost. A faithful minority of Jews has embraced their Messiah.

But our greatest hope from this rests in the *character of God*. We know the Lord always fulfills His promises... "In the same way" that God chose a remnant to preserve Israel in Elijah's day... He did so in Paul's day... as the majority of the Israelites rejected Christ... and in like manner... *God will choose a remnant of believers in the last days to enact His plan.*

Matthew 24:10 and 2 Thessalonians 2 reveal that there will be many (who look like believers in the church) who will fall away.

My heart was aching earlier this week... when I learned about another evangelical leader (from whom I have learned so much) had fallen into sexual sin. Not only do we see the culture around us becoming increasingly wicked... we see it more and more *inside the church.*

What do we say in such times? Many (myself included) are inclined to be pessimistic. "*The American culture... and our own church culture is wicked. Virtue is declining. I might as well give up.*"

But that is not the true picture. The culture may indeed be rushing down a slippery slope to damnation... and there may be a massive departure seen in the church... but God has His remnant (nevertheless) and this remnant has *not* bowed its knee to the Baal of sex and possessions. ... There *are* devout people... who are living for God and trying to do the right thing... often in what are terrible circumstances. (And Matthew 24 and 2 Thessalonians 2 also tell us that the lawlessness that we are seeing today - will only get worse in the last days.)

We should be seeking out our fellow believers and encouraging them whenever we can! That is what the church is to be... after all — the company of those who are living for God and are encouraging one another to live for Him (all the more... “*as we see the day drawing near.*”)

So let us get on with it. “*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus*” and so run the race set out for us (just as Hebrews 12:1-2 tells us to do.) ... Furthermore... let us run it... knowing that one day (like ourselves) all God's elect people will stand before Him... having conquered this present wicked world. ... And though we will generally have been despised and persecuted (which very well might increase)... we will know that God has accomplished His perfect will in us... and that nothing we have done for Jesus will have been done in vain. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

In getting back to our passage today... Paul has been showing us that only a remnant (not the majority) – perfectly fits the pattern of God’s ways. God has not rejected the Jews... in light of only a remnant having believed the Messiah.

But Paul did not want us to misunderstand... and think that those who are part of the remnant had earned or deserved (in any way) their privilege to be part of God’s plan. It is as if Paul anticipated what his readers would be thinking after he wrote about Elijah:

“Well, it is true that those were dark days. But at least there were seven thousand who did not bow to Baal. Let's give them credit for that! Those Jewish people should be commended. Thank God that we Jews have the strong spiritual character that we do!”

Paul cuts such thinking off by re-emphasizing a common theme of his letter...

Romans 11:6

The kind of thinking that Paul tries to avert (by giving us verse 6 - here)... comes naturally to all of us... and Paul knew it.

(Stop and consider)... Do you think it's easier for God to love you when you're good? ... Do you secretly suspect that God chose you because you deserved it? ... Do you think some people's behavior is so bad that God couldn't possibly save them? ... If you ever think in these terms... then you don't entirely understand that salvation is by **grace**. It cannot be earned... in whole - or in part. And if you think that God saved you... because He looked into your future and saw that you would eventually choose and serve Him... then you still believe in a system of works. (LISTEN!) He does not save us by what we **have done** or **will do**.

The idea of being saved by *merit* contradicts the very idea of *grace*. If a man owes me a *debt*... and pays it... it cannot be said to be done by *grace*. I have a *claim* on him for it... and there is no *grace* in his paying his just dues. ... And from this it follows that salvation cannot be *partly* by grace and *partly* by works.

Two things must characterize any Christian. ... One is a profound sense of personal sin and unworthiness. ... The other is an overwhelming awareness of the grace of God. ... (And) the two go together. ... Without a proper sense of sin - we will never appreciate grace. We will think that the

good we experience from God's hand... is something we deserve (that we somehow earned it.)

Romans 11:7

I don't think anyone can address this verse as well as J. Vernon McGee did. So I will quote him.

It is important to notice that they were hardened because they failed; they did not fail because they were hardened. A lot of folk get the cart before the horse -- in fact, they get the horse in the cart, and it doesn't belong there!

In judging them for rejecting Him... God removed their ability to see and hear and to turn from sin. They would experience the consequences of their rebellion. ... (You know) resisting God is just like saying to Him: "*Leave me alone!*" ... And when we say that to God... His answer might be to agree. He might make us less sensitive and more hardened to Him.

Romans 11:8-10

Verse 8 quotes from Deuteronomy 29... and verses 9 and 10 quote from Isaiah 69: 22-23. ... Isaiah 69 is one of the most important of the messianic psalms that prophesied about Jesus. It is referred to several times in our New Testaments. ... Strikingly... the whole psalm speaks of David's sufferings at the hands of persecutors among his own people.

Metaphorically speaking... these persons had put gall in David's food... and vinegar in his drink. ... David prayed that the 'table' God places before them will likewise be bitter.

David prays that (where they expected joy and refreshment) that it might (instead) prove to them the means of punishment. David's petition was...

that *while they* were seeking refreshment and joy... and anticipating at their table no danger... that their *temporal* enjoyments would lead them away from God... and produce stupidity and indifference to their spiritual interests.

This is what happened to Israel: their spiritual blessings should have led them to Christ... but instead they became a snare that kept them from Christ. ... Their very religious practices and observances became substitutes for the real experience of salvation. ... Sad to say... but this same mistake is made today when people depend on religious rituals and practices... instead of trusting in Christ (Who is pictured in these activities.)

This is a critical point. It means that if the blessings of God are misused—and they always are misused unless we allow them to lead us to faith in Jesus as our Savior—they will inevitably harden our hearts... propel us into further sins... and eventually lead to even greater judgment.

What Paul says here about hardening should be sobering to both Jew and Gentile. This principle is universal. ... If anyone hears the truth and does not respond to it... the time can come in which he or she will be incapable of responding. ... There are some in every church who are dead to the Word of God. They hear the Word week-in and week-out. But they never respond to it... as they should - and that is a terrifying thing. The Lord Jesus (speaking of this) said in Matthew 13:12...

Matthew 13:12 (ESV)

¹² *For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.*

Do you understand that? ... It means that if you will not allow the good things we enjoy - *as allegedly "Christian people"* - to lead you to Christ... which is what God has given them to us for... they will be worse than worthless to you. ... They will actually be harmful and propel you inevitably into an even greater spiritual hardness of heart... and sin. ... Don't allow that! [P A U S E]

Today we have been studying a passage that makes abundantly clear... that God has a plan that He is **FAITHFULLY** carrying out. (And LISTEN!) God has a plan for your life!

He did not abandon Israel... and He has not abandoned you! ... You may feel like you are in a holding pattern right now... enduring an unproductive season... unable to accomplish anything. ... You may feel like God has benched you in His game plan... set aside... forsaken. ... **Or** you may find yourself standing alone - against a lawless majority.

(LISTEN!) God still delights to accomplish His plan through a faithful remnant... when deep spiritual darkness sets-in. ... So remain steadfast in what you know to be right.

What a time... that He has you and I to be living in right now... huh?