

Romans 10:18-11:12 “Israel and the Gentiles” November 23, 2008
Isaiah 65 Psalm 69

At the beginning of this series on Romans we looked at Paul’s mission:
“to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.”

In other words, Paul’s mission is to make disciples of the nations.
And his letter to the Romans is all about that mission.
Paul wants you to understand your place in the kingdom of God.
He wants you to understand what God is doing in history –
and how *you* fit into what God is doing.

So often we think backwards.

We think that we are the center of the story.
“How does God’s word apply to me?”
That question assumes that “I” am the central focus.
You may have heard some say that gave us the Bible as the instruction manual for life.
But again, that still sounds like we are the central point.

Instead, we ought to ask “What is God doing in history?”
The Bible is not an instruction manual (if you approach it that way,
you will find vast swathes of the Bible that would appear useless.
What, after all, will you do with the hundreds of chapters of OT history
and prophecy that has no obvious “application” to *my* life).
Rather, the Bible tells a story.
The Bible contains the narrative of what God is doing in history.
In one sense, you and I are not really all that important in this story.
We are not the main characters in this narrative.

The story of the Bible is not all about me.
The story of the Bible is all about Jesus.
And *because* it is all about Jesus,
it *does* speak to you.
It calls you to look to him,
to believe in him,
to love him,
and to obey him.

1. Hearing vs. Understanding: Israel’s Disobedience (10:18-21)

In Romans 9-11 Paul has said that Israel failed to attain the righteousness of the law
because they did not pursue it by faith, but by works.
Paul’s central concern in chapters 9-11 is to explain why Israel has stumbled –
why Israel has fallen.

And Paul has emphasized a lot of passages that emphasize how God had *said* through the prophets that only a remnant of Israel will be left.

In chapter 10 Paul has shown that God's purposes in election come about through the means that he has appointed – "faith comes by hearing, and hearing from the word of Christ."

And so Paul responds to this with the natural question that follows:

But I ask, have they not heard?

In the context the "they" should be understood primarily as Israel. After all, in verse 16 Paul says "they have not all obeyed the gospel," and he quotes Isaiah 53:1 – a passage speaking to Israel.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the word of Christ, but have they not heard?

And Paul replies by quoting Psalm 19.

*Indeed they have, for
Their voice has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world. (v18)*

Psalm 19 is an interesting choice. Psalm 19 talks about how God's revelation goes forth to the ends of the earth. But it is talking about *general* revelation – God's work in creation. The point Paul is making is that if God's word has gone out to all creation, then most certainly it has gone out to Israel.

After all, Psalm 19 goes on to emphasize the importance of the law of God in his special revelation to his people.

So then Paul asks his second question:

But I ask, did Israel not understand?

They have heard.
But have they understood the message?
Paul gives two quotations from the scriptures in answer:

First Moses says,

*I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation;
with a foolish nation I will make you angry. (v19)*

This is a quote from Deuteronomy 32 – the Song of Moses.

In verse 20 God refers to Israel as “a perverse generation,
children in whom is no faithfulness.

They have made me jealous with what is no god;
they have provoked me to anger with their idols.

So I will make them jealous with those who are no people;
I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.” (Dt 32:20-21)

Ever since the days of Moses, God has revealed his purpose
to make Israel jealous through the Gentiles.

Second, Paul turns to Isaiah 65:1-2

Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,

I have been found by those who did not seek me;

I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me. (v20)

But of Israel he says,

All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people. (v21)

Paul shows that God has shown mercy toward the Gentiles –

“I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.”

They did not seek, but they found.

They did not inquire of the Lord, yet he has revealed himself to them.

But God has been even more gracious toward Israel –
and yet they would not come.

“All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people,”
to “a people who provoke me to my face continually” (65:3).

Patiently, God has continued to hold out his hands to Israel.

But Israel will not obey.

Indeed, you can hear echoes of this patient lament

as Jesus looked over Jerusalem in Matthew 23, and cried out:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets
and stones those who are sent to it!

How often would I have gathered your children together
as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!”

And again, as Jesus stretched out his hands on the cross,

you see once more the patient call of God to his wayward people.
And once more, you see the response of a wayward and disobedient people,
as they refused to see their Messiah.

It is easy, perhaps, to see this section of Romans as somewhat anti-Israel.

But I need to remind you of what is coming.

In 11:19ff Paul will say,

“Then you will say, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’

That is true.

They were broken off because of their unbelief,
but you stand fast through faith.

So do not become proud, but fear.

For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.”

This is not anti-Israel.

Paul is explaining that God had a purpose for the rebellion of Israel.

And that purpose is about you.

He has brought you into the chosen people of God.

But this should not make you complacent!

Paul’s doctrine of election does not result in a fatalistic mentality.

“O well, there’s nothing I can do about it!”

Rather, since God has ordained the means as well as the ends,

therefore we must avail ourselves of the means that God has given:

faith, hearing the Word, fearing God.

2. Has God Rejected His People? Elijah and the Remnant of Israel (11:1-6)

Paul then asks a third question.

I ask, then, has God rejected his people?

This would be an easy conclusion to draw.

But if you think about it,

if God destroyed the wilderness generation for their unbelief,
but blessed their children;

and if God sent Judah into exile for their unbelief,
but restored them 70 years later;

if the whole remnant theme has been an essential part of biblical teaching
ever since Moses;

then the fact that only a remnant now believes in Jesus should not surprise us.

That’s why Paul says:

*By no means! [me genoito]
For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham,
a member of the tribe of Benjamin.
God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.*

Paul is reminding us of his language in Romans 8
(whom he foreknew he also predestined...)
God has not rejected his chosen people.

But as Paul has already shown,
not everyone who is biologically descended from Israel belong to Israel.
“It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God,
but the children of the promise.” (9:8)

And Paul uses the example of Elijah to show this:

*Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah,
how he appeals to God against Israel?
Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars,
and I alone am left, and they seek my life?*

In 1 Kings 18, Elijah confronted the wicked King Ahab.
Ahab was the king of Israel who introduced the worship of Baal.
And after three and a half years of drought,
Elijah challenges Baal, the storm-god of the Canaanites,
to a contest.
Who can bring fire from heaven: Baal or Yahweh?
After Elijah calls down fire from heaven,
the people of Israel respond well: “Yahweh, he is God!”
and they slaughter the prophets of Baal.

Does this mean that Israel has returned to the worship of Yahweh?
Well, no.
Queen Jezebel sets out to kill Elijah.
Within hours of his great triumph,
it has become clear that there was no change of heart in Israel.

And so in 1 Kings 19 Elijah sets out for Mt. Horeb – Mt. Sinai –
the mountain where God established his covenant with Israel.
It takes him 40 days and 40 nights to get there –
just as Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights on the mountain.

Too often people have seen this episode as one where Elijah is whining and complaining.

But Elijah is not grumbling against God.
He is not using a whining tone when he says,
“the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant...and I, even I only, am left.”

Rather, Elijah has come as a prophet like Moses.
Moses had stood on this mountain hundreds of years before,
and Moses had pled with God to have mercy on Israel.
Elijah comes and says,
*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.*

This is not the language of a whiner.
This is the language of a prophet who is bringing charges against his people.

“God, the covenant has been broken. Your people have rebelled.
What are you going to do about it?!”

Paul understand this.
He says that Elijah appealed to God *against Israel*.

And what did God say?
I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

It is not true that Elijah was the only one left.
And even so, today – at the present time –
there is a remnant chosen by grace.

God has graciously preserved a remnant.
But that remnant is chosen by grace,
or, to render it more literally,
“according to the election of grace.”

Paul wants to make it clear that you do not become part of the remnant by works.
*But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works;
otherwise grace would no longer be grace. (v6)*

Are you trying to please God by what you do?
Do you, at times, worry that your works aren't good enough?

Salvation is by grace.

And if it is by grace, then it is no longer by works.
Otherwise grace would not be grace.

3. Israel's Fall Means Salvation for the Gentiles (11:7-12)

What then?

Okay, what is the point of all this?

Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking.

The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened.

The word means “turned to stone.”

Paul is drawing on his earlier discussion of Pharaoh back in chapter 9.

We suggested then that Paul uses two Gentiles kings,

Pharaoh and Cyrus,

to illustrate the principle of the potter and the clay.

God has prepared some vessels for glory – and others for destruction.

And so here Paul draws on that language to say that the elect (among Israel) have obtained what Israel was seeking (a law that led to righteousness), but the rest were hardened.

Because Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.
And so those who have believed have obtained Christ.

And here Paul blends Is 29:10 and Dt 29:4.

He has been moving back and forth from Moses to Isaiah throughout the passage.

So here he just blends them together.

God gave them a spirit of stupor,

eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.

The first line comes from Isaiah 29:10

“For the LORD has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep,
and has closed your eyes (the prophets),
and covered your heads (the seers).”

Deuteronomy 29:4 says

“But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand
or eyes to see or ears to hear.”

After all Paul has done to show that Deuteronomy and Isaiah have the same message,
it is fitting that he would weave them together in his concluding statement!

Nothing has changed.

The refusal of Israel to listen to the gospel is no surprise.

The rebellion of Israel has not thwarted God's plans.

This *was* God's plan!

This has been the pattern from the beginning.

We sang earlier from Psalm 69.

Paul quotes that Psalm and says that this is about Israel as well.

*Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them;
let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.*

We sometimes struggle with singing words like this.

How can we pray – how can we sing – asking God to curse the wicked?

Well, what have they done?

Psalm 69:21 – “they gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.”

Psalm 69:26 – “they persecute him whom you have struck down,
and they recount the pain of those you have wounded.”

What have they done?

They have rejected the Christ!

Sure, when it was first written, the anointed one was David.

But Psalm 69 is taken up into the mouth of our Savior –

and for that matter, verse 25 was applied to Judas:

“May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents.”

In other words, Psalm 69 is praying for God's judgment

against those who should know better!

...those who *do* know better!

Think of the preacher who plunders the flock in order to live in a grand style.

Think of the pastor who preys upon children.

Think of the teacher who says “the Bible is full of lies.”

Think of the elder and the deacon who care more for their status
than for the poor man lying in a ditch.

When you think of all these,

that is what David was thinking of –

that is what Paul was thinking of –

when they say

“let their table become a snare and a trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for them;
let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see,
and bend their backs forever.”

Because all of these have denied Christ.
The imprecations of Psalm 69 are not to be sung against the pagans.
They are to be sung against the church.
They are to be sung against those who *ought to know better!*

They are to be sung against those who will not preach Christ.
They are to be sung against those who say that good works will save you.

But we should not forget that Paul uses them in Romans 11:9-10 against Israel.
Israel's eyes have been darkened so that they cannot see.
Certainly God has saved remnant of Israel –
but he has hardened the rest.

And there is a purpose in their stumbling.

Paul asks of that purpose:

So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall?
And he answers emphatically:
By no means! (me genoito)
Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles,
so as to make Israel jealous. (v11)

God's purpose in the stumbling of Israel is to bring salvation to the Gentiles,
and then, by including the Gentiles in Israel's salvation,
God's purpose is make Israel jealous.

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! (v12)

We'll come back to this next week.

Conclusion: God's Purpose in Election Includes Not only the "Who" but also the "How"

For now it is sufficient to say that God's purpose in election is fulfilled
both through the grace shown to the remnant of Israel,
and through the hardening of the rest.

When we talk about election, we are not just talking about some abstract doctrine.
We are talking about God's purposes for history.
And as we've seen, God's purposes in election include not only the "who"
but also the "how."
When God foreordains who he will save,

he also foreordains the means.

Some have asked, if God has already chosen them,
then what is the use of preaching?!

But God has ordained that he will use the preaching of his Word to save sinners.
“How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard...
So faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.”

If they never hear, then they will never believe.

Paul never uses the doctrine of election as a guide to action.

After all, do you know what God has foreordained to happen tomorrow?
No!

God has not revealed to us his secret will.

Rather, God has revealed to us what he has commanded for us to do.

Therefore, let us go and do what he has said –

because God has promised that he will use the ordinary means of grace,
he will use the ordinary, everyday love of God and neighbor,
to accomplish his redemptive purposes in history.