

Sermons through

Romans

Their Failure, Their Fullness

Part Three
A Magnified Ministry
Romans 11:11-15

With Study Questions

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I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles. ¹² Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! ¹³ For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are my flesh* and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead (Romans 11:11-15)?

Introduction

We had mentioned last time that there is some legitimacy in the notion that God works in mysterious ways. The very passage we're examining today contains the disclosure of a mystery that the Apostle Paul did not want his readers to miss.

For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Romans 11:25).

A mystery *mysterion* is not a contradiction, nor is it merely an escape clause for something inexplicable. It is generally referring to something unknown or unanticipated then revealed or disclosed (Romans 16:25, 26; Ephesians 1:9; 3:3). Is God still working in mysterious ways? Yes, but we do not have modern day prophets or apostles who can lift the veil of God's secret counsel as we see here with the Apostle.

The comfort of our souls is in the knowledge that our Father in heaven has things well in hand. And He will providentially reveal to us that which we need to know when we need to know it.

When we take our family to the theatre or an amusement park, we do not give the children their tickets until they're standing in line. There is no reason for them to have them before then – they may lose them or trade them for magic beans. God will let us know when we need to know, when we need to know it. Then we are called to respond appropriately.

What we are observing with the gospels and letters of the New Testament is a transition from the Old to New Covenant. God had preserved Israel because it would be through Israel that the seed – that is Christ – would come. It is for this reason that two of the four gospels (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38) begin with a genealogy.

But it was always God's plan to save the world (John 3:17), not merely one nation. This goes all the way back – clearly seen in the promise made to Abraham:

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

What would the fulfillment of this promise look like? We should not be ignorant of this. It should not have even been a mystery.

**And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."
⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Galatians 3:8, 9).**

God had made a promise. He had kept that promise – a promise which is to be preached. And to which there is to be a response of faith and repentance (Acts 2:38, 29).

God had not failed to keep His promise (Romans 9:6) as some were supposing. God's promise was not merely that He would send His Son to save sinners but that He would call sinners to Himself (Acts 2:39). But whether it was the Old Covenant or New Covenant, the instrument by which God would save was faith – whether Old or New without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11). One is not saved works or by

inclusion in a community – even the covenant community. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

The community of which Paul was part had lost sight of that. And instead of repenting, they – as men are accustomed to do – were accusing. The question now was, what of that community? What of Israel? Toward the end of chapter nine Paul conveyed that if not for the seed they would have had the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah (Romans 9:29). Of course now the seed (Christ) had come, so would they have the fate of Sodom? The answer was ‘no’. Israel was not beyond redemption.

But let us not draw the conclusion that because God chooses not to judge in history (as with Sodom) that those from whom He has withheld judgment have somehow found favor in His sight – as many Bible teachers tend to do with Israel in this passage. The great error of Israel – the great error of many religious communities – is to assume that being part of a religion is the answer to man’s dilemma with sin and death. As this very passage tells us, the Apostle Paul’s great desire was that those who were his “**flesh**” might be saved (Romans 11:14).

Many Christians today find themselves discouraged and perplexed by the religious, political and cultural environment in which we find ourselves. How much more was this true during the writing of this epistle! There was very little faith to be found in the covenant community (a mere remnant – Romans 11:5), the political climate was hostile (For God’s sake they were killed all day long: accounted as sheep for the slaughter – Romans 8:36) and there was conflict within the church itself (Romans 2).

The Apostle gives the ministerial answer to these conflicts and confusions. He is defending the very trustworthiness of God (Romans 9:6) while his heart aches for his apostate fellow Israelite countrymen (Romans 9:3; 10:1; 11:14), though his specific ministry was to the gentiles (Acts 9:15; 22:21; Galatians 1:16; 2:7-9; Ephesians 3:8).

He will begin to reveal the providential works of God as it speaks to the ethnic Israelite, the Israelite of promise and the gentiles. It also shows that God is indeed faithful to His covenant. And in so doing Paul finds a comfort which yields the inevitable doxology.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Romans 11:33)!

So what is the providential working which leads to the doxology? The Israelites, for the most part wanted nothing of Jesus. There was a remnant of faithful believers within Israel (Romans 11:2-5) but what of the rest? Paul rhetorically asks if **“they stumbled that they should fall?”** And the answer was **“Certainly not” (Romans 11:11a)**! They had not reached a point where they were unredeemable. There was still hope and a plan.

The Apostle now reveals that plan. He will now explain the mystery – a mystery which includes the provocation of jealousy – the value of their failure and the joy of their acceptance.

But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles. ¹² Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! ¹³ For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are my flesh* and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead (Romans 11:11-15)?

Jealousy

Part of this mysterious plan is how the Jews will be provoked to jealousy through the salvation of the gentiles. We must realize that jealousy *parazelosai* is not necessarily a bad thing. In the Ten Commandments we read that God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:6). It might be helpful to make a distinction between jealousy and envy *phthonos*. Envy is desiring that which rightfully belongs to someone else whereas jealousy is a response to someone taking that which is rightfully yours. There can certainly be bad reactions to jealousy but jealousy itself is not necessarily bad.

So we shouldn't understand a passage like this to be God tempting the Israelite to an inappropriate passion. In a certain sense the gentiles are fully receiving those covenant promises/privileges which the Israelites viewed as theirs. The Apostle began this entire section writing of the Israelites...

...to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises (Romans 9:4).

But they had so distorted the truth that it had become almost unrecognizable as a covenant of grace. They transformed the gift of God (as religious pursuits tend to do) into a quest of man. Paul had earlier taught that though the Gentiles did not pursue righteousness they still attained against it. Israel did pursue yet did not attain it because they pursued it by **“the works of the law” (Romans 9:32).**

By grace through faith the Gentiles and a remnant of faithful Israel had obtained that which the works of a religious community could never obtain. It was Paul’s great desire that those who were his **“flesh”** would be provoked to jealousy when they saw that that which was promised in their midst and that which they strove with so much effort to attain, was freely given to the faithful:

- Israel was promised the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27) but in Romans 8:4 this promise is fulfilled in the church.
- Israel had been promised a future resurrection (Ezekiel 37) but Paul tells the church God, who raised Christ will give life to your mortal bodies (Romans 8:10-11).
- Israel was God’s son (Exodus 4:22) now believers in Christ are sons and daughters (Romans 8:14-17).
- An inheritance was promised to Israel (Isaiah 60) but now the believer is the “joint heir” with Christ (Romans 8:17).
- Israel was God’s chosen people (Amos 3:2) but Paul aims this blessed designation to those who have faith in Christ (Roman 8:29-30).
- God had promised never to forsake Israel (Deuteronomy 31:6) but it is the church – the believer – who can have the assurance

that nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:39).

It might be important to note just what it was that Paul was hoping the Israelite would be jealous of. But the jealousy of which Paul writes is not a jealousy of good marriages, lucrative jobs, psychological security, physical health and well-being, friendships or any other number of things we would all enjoy having. It is a jealousy of having favor with God and the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3). Thinking of human relationships, a man is jealous not because some other man has his wife's possessions, but his wife's attention or affection.

What we really want people to be jealous of – and strongly desire – is peace with God through Christ. If that is the central focus of the church, we can rest assured that all other secondary issues will be appropriately addressed.

Paul then mentions the “**failure**” of the Jews but then also their “**fullness**” (Romans 11:12). These nouns are parallel to “**cast away**” and “**acceptance**” (Romans 11:15). This culminates with Paul rejoicing that when they come to faith it will be nothing less than “**life from the dead.**” This is a ministerial heart which cares greatly for the lost – even lost who are adversarial in their words and actions.

In summary the turn of events goes like this:

- The Jews reject Jesus and the grace of the gospel
- God turns to the nations and begins the Great Commission
- The Jews will, through a sort of jealousy, turn back to Christ

Apostle to the Gentiles

Paul did not view his specific calling to minister to the gentiles as a neglect of his fellow countrymen. No, the more he “**magnify(y)ied**” *doxazo* his ministry to the gentiles the more it would provide that which would yield that which would appeal to his fellow Israelite.

It was kind of a ‘first things first’ commitment that we are to have.

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

Though Paul had a conviction to be **“all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22, 23)**, it was never at the expense of truth of his message and the primary focus of his ministerial attention.

You may wish to think of it this way: when someone visits a church, they are often put off if they are ignored or not warmly greeted. It is certainly nice when a visitor is greeted and welcomed. But if I were looking for a church I would be more observant on their love for each other than their skill at greeting a visitor.

Conclusion

What do we make of this passage? Where is the ministerial comfort? Where is the challenge in terms of our faithfulness? First, we see Paul’s disclosing of God’s faithfulness. His word – His promises – have not failed (Romans 9:6). Because things don’t unfold quite the way we would like or anticipate does not mean God is unfaithful. God is not about accommodating our plans. We are to trust in His plan and make sure we are on the right side of it – which means to ever trust in His gracious provision in Christ.

Secondly, we must be careful that we magnify the ministry that God calls us to magnify. Paul, like John the Baptist, Stephen (Acts 6:11) and Jesus Himself (John 8:48) appeared to pit himself against the religious community in such a way as to be accused to being an enemy to the true and living God. But regardless of those threats and accusations he would magnify a ministry that set its lens on Christ; as John the Baptist said **“He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30)**. As Mary said **“My soul magnifies the Lord” (Luke 1:46)**.

Questions for Study

1. What is a mystery according to the Bible? What is not a mystery? Why do you suppose there are mysteries (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is significant about the transition from the Old to New Covenant (pages 3, 4)?
3. What was the promise that God made? How was that promise fulfilled (pages 3, 4)?
4. How was Israel compared to Sodom? How is it not like Sodom (page 4)?
5. What was the religious and political climate like during the writing of Romans? How does that speak to us today (page 4)?
6. Explain the use of jealousy in the salvation of Paul's countrymen (pages 5-7).
7. How was that apostle's ministry to the gentiles beneficial to the Jews? What do we learn from that (pages 7, 8)?