

Romans: The Good News of God

God's Plan of Salvation for Jews and Gentiles

Romans 11:11-22

Rev. Freddy Fritz

March 29, 2009

God's Plan of Salvation for Jews and Gentiles

Scripture

Romans 11 has been the occasion of many disputes and interpretations over the matter of God's dealing with Israel and the end times. Some come to Romans 11 and say that this chapter predicts that Israel will come together as a nation before the return of Christ, and that there will be an almost or complete conversion of Israel as a nation state, and that there will be a reign of one thousand years of that nation state on earth prior to Christ's return.

Others have said, "No. This passage says nothing about the Israel of the future. It's all about the present, and there is no future role for the nation of Israel in God's plan of redemption."

So, there have been many disputes about what Romans 11 means.

The famous Southern Presbyterian theologian, James Henley Thornwell, received a letter when he was about forty years old from a man inquiring as to what his views of the end times were, and especially of Romans 11. Thornwell wrote back a letter and said, "I'm only forty years old and I consider that I am too young to have an answer to that question."

That was very encouraging to me. I'm learning with you as we go through Romans 11 and I trust God will speak to us as we learn together from his word. Let's read Romans 11:11-22:

¹¹So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. ¹²Now 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!

¹³Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I

am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry ¹⁴in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. ¹⁵For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? ¹⁶If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

¹⁷But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, ¹⁸do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. ¹⁹Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. ²²Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. (Romans 11:11-22)

Introduction

Paul is writing in Romans 11 to a congregation that consists predominantly of Gentile Christians. There are Jewish Christians that are part of the congregation but Paul is writing to a church where Gentile Christians are in the majority. And he is teaching them the correct understanding of how God deals with both Jews and Gentiles in terms of their salvation.

Lesson

In today's lesson, Paul helps us understand God's plan of salvation for Jews and Gentiles.

I. God's Plan Is Gracious (11:11)

First, Paul teaches us that God's plan of salvation is gracious.

Look at what Paul does. He begins by asking a question in verse 11a, **“So I ask, did they [i.e., Israel] stumble in order that they might fall?”** And he answers, **“By no means!”**

Now, you may have been expecting him to say, “Yes. Israel stumbled over the stumbling stone and they fell. Yes, they did fall finally. God is done with them.”

But Paul’s answer is the opposite. He says, “No. God didn’t do it for that purpose, and he isn’t finished with his people.”

On the contrary, in verse 11 Paul says that God’s purpose in sending his Son into the world and being rejected by his people, as well as sending the apostles into the world and their gospel being largely rejected by the Jewish people was to enable **salvation to come to the Gentiles.**

But that’s not where Paul stops. **Salvation has not only come to the Gentiles,** it has also made **Israel jealous.** Paul’s point is this: The conversion of the Gentiles itself has a view to the evangelism of the Jews.

Now you say, “Oh that’s all well and good, and that’s very interesting, but what in the world does that have to do with my day to day walk with Christ?”

The answer is at least this: God uses the severest judgments for the purposes of his grace. When we see, for instance, Christians martyred in other lands, we need to remember that God uses the blood of the martyrs for his own gracious purposes. When we experience hard things in our own lives, we need to remember that God’s gracious purposes are always at work, even in the hardest of circumstances.

We certainly learn this here because God brought blessing out of a situation of judgment and unbelief.

II. The Salvation of the Jews Is a Blessing for Gentile Believers (11:12, 15)

Second, the salvation of the Jews is a blessing for Gentile believers. Paul repeats himself so as to be understood. He says in

verses 12 and 15: **“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! For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?”**

Paul’s argument is that if it was a blessing to the Gentiles that Israel, by and large, rejected the Messiah, how much greater a blessing to the Gentiles is it going to be when Israel accepts the Messiah? Paul is saying that God’s works of grace in the present and future are going to be greater than his works of grace in the past.

That is an important lesson for us to learn. We often have the idea that the greatest things were done in the past. God’s grace is going to eclipse in the future even the glories of the past.

Those of us who love the doctrines of grace in the Reformed faith fondly look back to the Great Awakening and long for those days. Or, we long for the days of the Puritans. Or, we look back to the days of Knox or Calvin and say, “Oh, it will never be that good again.”

The Apostle Paul is saying, “God’s work of grace in the future is going to eclipse what he has done in the past.”

Now, there are many practical applications to this passage, but one of them is clearly that this passage ought to move Christians to a practical love for Jewish people—even as we ought to love all people—and long for their salvation.

This passage does not teach us that we have to take a particular stance with regard to the modern nation state of Israel, but it certainly says that we must have in our heart a longing to see the salvation of God come to Jews.

And second, I want to say by way of practical application that God has designed the salvation of his people in such a way that the salvation of each serves the interest of the other. The Jewish people rejected the Messiah, and that resulted in the conversion of the Gentiles, which in turn resulted in blessing to Israel, which in turn resulted in a blessing to the Gentiles.

Isn't that interesting? It's a divine conspiracy in which the blessing for one redounds to the benefit of the other. And isn't that the way it ought to be? Isn't that the way our salvation is? Your salvation blesses me, it encourages me, it strengthens me, and I benefit from it. In turn, my salvation brings blessing and encouragement to you as well.

One of the privileges that Session members have is to listen to prospective communicant members share the story of God's grace in their lives. I am always encouraged as I hear how God has extended his grace to fellow believers. This is a practical way in which this truth applies to us today.

III. Our Proper Attitude to the Jewish People Should Be for Their Salvation (11:13-14)

Third, our proper attitude to the Jewish people should be for their salvation. Paul says in verses 13-14: **“Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.”**

Paul identifies himself as the apostle to the Gentiles, but then he says, “I want you to understand that I have an emphatically pro-Jewish ministry.” You see, there would have been some who would have seen him as a traitor, as a turncoat.

Mitch Glazer, who was one of the chief evangelists for *Jews for Jesus* once said, “When I became a Christian, my parents rejected me. They refused to acknowledge that I existed. They don't correspond with me, they don't speak with me, but my grandmother still loves me and she'll speak to me. So, I said to my grandmother, ‘Grandmother, I don't understand this. Dad doesn't even believe in God. Dad's an atheist. He's Jewish ethnically, but he's an atheist. He doesn't believe in the Torah, he doesn't believe in the writings, he doesn't believe in the prophets, I believe in all those things. I believe in God, I believe in the Torah, I believe in the writings, I believe in the prophets. It's just in addition to that I

believe in Jesus Christ. I believe that he fulfills all those things. Which one of us is the better Jew? Me or Dad?’

“And she immediately said, ‘Oh, your dad, because he doesn’t believe in Jesus Christ.’”

Paul’s goal was to **make his fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.** And Paul is saying that we ought to have a longing for the salvation for the Jewish people. Jealousy is not the instrument of grace. Faith is. Paul is saying that our experience of the grace and the promises of God ought to be an evident display to God’s ancient people so that they desire to embrace him too.

IV. A Proper View of God’s Grace Will Produce Humility, not Arrogance (11:17-18)

Fourth, a proper view of God’s grace will produce humility, not arrogance.

In view of the fact that the spiritual root of the Gentiles is found in Israel should produce humility and not arrogance. Paul puts it this way in verses 17-18: **“But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.”**

When Paul uses the olive tree illustration, he knows that everyone in his hearing will know that the olive tree is an illustration of Israel. Haggai uses it. Habakkuk uses it. Other prophets use it to talk about Israel. Israel is the olive tree, and God is the gardener.

Paul knows that the illustration is horticulturally strange. Paul knows that it is not common practice to take a wild olive branch, and graft it into an old cultivated olive tree. He knows that normally it’s the other way around. Olive farmers would normally have taken a branch from an older, cultivated olive tree that was becoming less strong and less fruitful and more vulnerable to disease and would have grafted it into a wild olive tree, which would have then

produced good fruit.

He knew it was normally that way, but the illustration itself is designed to show you what a surprising thing God had done by bringing the Gentiles into his people. In fact, if you let your eyes run down to verse 24, you will see Paul explicitly says that he knows that this is not natural, to take a wild olive branch and graft it into a root of an old cultivated olive tree. He says that this is contrary to nature.

You see, then, that's his whole point. God's showing of grace to the Gentiles was mind blowing. We think of it as the plan of God, and it is. We've grown accustomed to it and perhaps we've taken it for granted. Paul is reminding us again what a surprising thing God has done to the Gentile Christians.

And this ought to produce humility and not arrogance in us who are Gentiles. Our spiritual root is the believing Israel.

Now, let me make two applications. First, the Church is one with Israel. The Church, as the new covenant people of God that includes both Jewish and Gentile Christians as distinct from the old covenant people of God, which was represented in the nation state of Israel, may be able to be distinguished from Israel, but they are all part of one body. Paul doesn't say there is the olive tree of Israel, and then there is the olive tree of the Church. They are all part of the same tree.

Everybody who heard Paul's illustration would have understood that. However, there are some very godly Christians who believe that the Church today has absolutely nothing to do with Israel. They believe that the Church was the result of the Jews surprising God by rejecting the Messiah and God had to fall back to plan B. And "pop!" Out came the church. Then one day, God will be finished with the Church and he'll get back to Israel. No, Paul's conception is that the Church and Israel are all part of the one people of God.

And second, Gentile Christians are to view themselves as united with the old covenant people of God, as sharers by grace in the same inheritance. It's not that the Jews were promised the Ab-

rahamic covenant, and we were promised something else. It's that we are both the recipients of the Abrahamic blessings by faith. All those, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, share in those blessings by faith. So, Paul is pointing to the legacy that we need to acknowledge.

V. Grace Produces Faith (11:19-21)

Fifth, Paul says that grace produces faith. He says in verses 19-21: **“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.”**

It seems that Paul has someone in his audience who is arguing with him. He thinks Paul is wrong. The quibble is basically this, “Well Paul, I understand that God used the people of old, you know, Israel back then, but Israel today has rejected him. In fact, by your own theology, Israel has been cut off so that I can be grafted in. So why, Paul, should I worry about my own salvation?”

The Apostle Paul basically responds in one of his typically Pauline ways: “Well, you know, you have a point there. But do you know how Israel got cut off? They got cut off by not believing. Do you know how you'll get cut off? You'll get cut off by not believing. Instead of sitting over there and gloating about the fact that Israel in this time has by and large turned its back on the Messiah, you be careful to believe, lest you fall, for we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. And should you reject the Messiah, you too will find out you are rejected.”

What a tremendous warning to *nominal* Christianity. You can go to church and go through the motions and never trust in Christ. You can memorize *The Shorter Catechism*. You can have an aunt who has prayed for you for years, a father who is an elder, but they can't believe for you. *You* have to believe in Christ. Nobody can do it for you. You must put your faith in Jesus Christ. You have to

trust in him. You have to respond to the gospel claims. You have to live by his grace. You have to walk in the life of faith.

The Apostle Paul is saying to these Gentiles, “Instead of looking over there at those who have been cut off, you need to do a little self examination and ask yourself, ‘Am I trusting in Christ?’”

VI. A Right View of God Is in and of Itself a Gift of Grace (11:22)

Finally, a right view of God is in and of itself a gift of grace. Paul says in verse 22: “**Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.**”

Paul is saying that, in the salvation of God and in the judgment of God, you have seen two aspects of his character, two attributes of God. You have seen his love and his justice, and both have been served to the full. Seeing his love and his justice ought to make you tremble, because we serve an awesome and living God, a consuming fire.

Paul’s God is so politically incorrect. The god you’ve been hearing about on CNN and MSNBC and FOX news, the god who is the same for everybody, the god who is the god of the Muslims, the god of the Christians, it’s all the same god. The god who is totally beneficent, who wouldn’t judge anybody. He’s just kind and good and loving. That god has no relation to Paul’s God.

God, the God of Paul, is a God of **kindness and severity**. How out of step can you be, Paul? And that’s how most people look at it. You believe in a God who judges, you believe in a narrow-minded, mean-spirited, small-hearted, shriveled-up God.

But, it’s the other way around.

What do I mean? A god who is beneficent and nothing else cannot deal with the injustice that exists in this world. It’s like somebody comes alongside of you and your world’s falling apart and all that they have to offer is, “I really feel for you. That must

be really tough.” But there is absolutely nothing constructive they can do for you. That’s a shriveled-up god.

Conclusion

You see, a god who is nothing but benevolent and is not holy and is not just and does not judge, it doesn’t cost him anything to come into relationship with sinners.

But a God who is holy, a God who is just, a God who is awesome, and who is loving beyond your capacity to conceive, it cost him everything to come into fellowship with you.

It cost him the outrages of the injustices suffered by his own Son so that you could experience the outrages of his love. And that’s the God of the New Testament.

Not a sterile grandfather, Omni-beneficent figure in the sky, distant from our injustice, and indifferent towards our sin.

But a God who loved us enough to become involved in our condition and to shed the blood of his own Son so that we could taste of the lavishness of his mercy.

That God may not be politically correct, but I’ll serve that God anywhere, anytime.

Paul is telling these Gentile Christians to look at their God. “Look at what he’s done to bring you into fellowship with him. Don’t you have a heart of longing that everyone out there, Israel included, would know the greatness of that love?”

May God help us to know him as he really is. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181
3. www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz

Please give your input and leave your feedback at websites 2 and 3 when requested to do so. This helps with evaluation and planning of sermons.

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAAYER:

Taken from Ray Ortland's *A Passion for God*:

O God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, how wicked, prejudiced and blind your Christian church has sometimes been toward the Jews. Some Christians, especially in previous ages, have looked down on them with contempt and even hatred, as if they alone were responsible for the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. No, Father, it was *our* sins that nailed him there.

Other Christians, especially in our present age, have failed the Jews by remaining silent about Christ, feeling overly cautious about sharing the gospel with them. We have not fulfilled your will that we make Israel jealous by our enjoyment of the promised Messiah.

For these two sins, O Lord, forgive us.

We long for the day when Christ will come again to heal all division. We long for the end of this present evil age and the final consummation of his kingdom.

Until that moment of his awesome appearing, O Lord God, renew your church, that we may be a magnetic witness to all the nations.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.