

Free From Slavery

Message 10

Jesus, Paul, and the Jews

Romans 9:1-11:36

(Read Romans 9:1-18)

Introduction

Nothing inflicts deeper pain than the loss of a loved one. We understandably weep over the death of a relative with cancer, or a friend in the armed service – and I know some of you here have known such pain. But what is even worse is the loss of a loved one still alive. I mean someone who used to be close to you, but has parted ways. Perhaps he dropped out of school and is mired in a life of drugs. Perhaps she decided Christianity was not for her and she refused to be your friend any more. I know that some of you have experienced this kind of pain, too. Now can you imagine how much worse it is for a mother or father who has poured his or her life into a child, only to see him abandon his family, reject his faith, and ruin his life? Think of all the sleepless nights, the worry over sickness, the time and money spent on necessities, education, and special activities – all that love gone to waste. A child is your greatest treasure. To lose him to death is terrible, but to lose him to other loves is unbearable. There is no anguish worse than this.

Paul did not have his own natural children, but he saw his converts as his children. And here in Romans 9-11 as he ponders the state of his fellow Jews, he reflects the fatherly agony of God over the lost Israelites – a people who not only rejected Him, but revolted and energetically fought against him. Look at the way Paul piles clause upon clause in the first five verses, as he spills out his deep longing for the Jews who have rejected the gospel. He feels his heart is torn in two, he is in agony of grief, he would do anything – even take a curse upon himself, if possible – to save his fellow Jews. How could it be? How could Israel reject the Messiah – *their* Messiah – whom they have awaited for thousands of years? This is the seed promised to Eve who would crush the serpent, the seed promised to Abraham who would bless all the families of the earth, the prophet promised by Moses to teach the people, the son promised to David who would rule forever, the savior prophesied by the prophets who would deliver the captive nation. Jesus was God Himself, “God with us”, as Isaiah promised, who delivered us from sin, Satan, and death. This was the fulfillment of 4,000 years of waiting. How could they not see it? What a disaster! What misery! How could they turn their backs on Jesus? How could they reject His salvation?

Paul answers this painful cry in chapters 9 and 10, and then proceeds to explain what the future holds for the Jews in chapter 11. Tonight we will catch the main points of his argument.

How did Israel Fall?

After all that God had done for them, in light of their very privileged position, and considering the blessings of the covenant with God, how could the Jews reject Christ? The first part of the answer is that they didn't! In verses 6 to 13 Paul points out that God's promises never applied to physical offspring – not at the beginning, and not now. God's covenant people had their beginning in Abraham, but only Isaac, only one of Abraham's many children received God's promise to Abraham. It was true in the next generation, too. Isaac had two sons, but only one received God's promise. This was the pattern all through Israel's history. In every generation, there were those who followed God, and those who didn't. Remember the days of Elijah? He was a prophet when Ahab was king in Israel. Ahab was a wicked king. He destroyed the prophets of God and brought in prophets of Baal. At one point Elijah cried out to God in desperation, “They have killed all your prophets, and I alone am left!” God replied that, no, there were 7,000 faithful in Israel. It was always this way. Ethnic and national Israel was always a mixture of true Israel and false Israel – those who followed God, and those who rejected God.

It was the same in Paul's day. Some Jews rejected Christ, but not all. Thousands of Jews believed the gospel, were baptized, and were faithful to Christ. The fact that some rejected Him does not negate the significance of those who believed Him. This is true Israel. These are the real Jews. The others are frauds, traitors. Their falseness does not tarnish the faithfulness of the true Jews.

But this raises the question of why some Jews are false, and Paul answers this question from two perspectives. First, in verses 14-29 Paul shows that God did not choose every Israelite to follow Him. He introduced this idea in verses 10-13 where he recounted God's dealing with Isaac's sons. They were born in identical conditions. Unlike Abraham's sons, these had the same mother. In fact they were even twins! They were conceived, born, and grew up the same way. But one followed God, and the other didn't. What was the difference? Did one obey God and the other not? Did one have faith and the other not? Surely this is the case – but Paul completely overlooks these questions. He attributes their different paths in life to one cause only – God's choice.

Nothing raises the hackles of people more than the notion that God plays a decisive role in salvation. It wounds our pride and insults our sense of justice. "What a travesty!" we say. "How dare God decide for us whether we should follow Him! We are perfectly capable of deciding for ourselves, thank you. Furthermore, what right does God have to condemn sinners if He made them sinful?" Paul replies to the first objection by pointing out that we are talking about One who is completely sovereign. How could God *not* play a determinative role in salvation? He governs all that happens on earth. That is what it means to be sovereign. It's integral to God's nature. A being who does not shape the course of all that happens is not God, but something else.

Furthermore, no one is denying that man is capable of deciding for himself whether he will follow God. It's just that he always decides not to! This is a critical point to grasp. This is why Paul spent so much time in chapters 1-3 discussing the thoroughly corrupting nature of sin. And remember chapter 8 verse 7, where he says, "The fleshly mind is hostile against God. It is not subject to the law of God, indeed it *can't* be subject to God's law." In Ephesians 2:1 Paul explains that we were dead in sins. Before God called us, we were as incapable of choosing Him as a corpse is of going to church. Left to ourselves, none of us would decide to follow God. None. Ever. As Paul said in chapter 3 verses 10-12, quoting the psalms,

*There is none righteous,
no, not one;
There is none who understands;
There is none who seeks after God.
They have all turned aside;
They have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good,
no, not one.*

But God, for no rational reason – only because of His overwhelming love, and His astonishing mercy to us, His pathetic rebels – God chose us to receive His mercy. What amazing love! What a God! What a reason to love and worship Him with all our hearts!

But isn't this unjust? No. Justice was served when Christ died for us, and justice is served when unbelievers die for their sins. But why should they die just because God chose them to die? Here you must remember that scripture never says that unbelievers die because God made them sin. They willingly chose to sin, and it is for that reason that they are condemned. God's act in saving and condemning are both

sovereign, but they are not symmetrical. The scripture consistently teaches that God saves some because He loves them in spite of their sin – but He condemns others because they are guilty of sin. God is always just. But He is merciful only to some. Why? How should we know? Are you God? These are heavy matters, and we understandably long for answers, but there is a limit to our understanding. The Bible teaches unambiguously that God chooses some to be saved and passes over others. It also teaches clearly that some are saved by believing in Christ, and others perish for rejecting Christ. All attempts to explain and combine these two teachings have ended in heresy. All we can do is believe what God has said and worship Him for His majestic wisdom and unfathomable mercy.

Why were some Jews true and others false? Two reasons. First, God, the sovereign of the universe, chose some to be saved from sin. Second, although they heard God's word, some rejected Him and lived in sin. It's the same today. God is the same and man is the same. We can't understand why, but God choose some to believe the gospel, and others persist in sin. Those who believe become God's sons, but the others are condemned for their sin. Why doesn't God save everyone? We don't know. What's even more difficult to understand is why He saves *anyone*. You don't deserve to be saved. You didn't do anything to please God. You were thoroughly sinful – but God had compassion on you. You had a narrow escape from eternal punishment. Doesn't this move you to profound love and worship?

What is Israel's Future?

(Read 11:13-21, 25-32))

Now Paul takes up the question of what will happen to Israel in the future. His core argument, which he repeats several times, is that the massive response of the Gentiles to the gospel will provoke the Jews to return to God, which in turn will bring an enormous blessing to everyone on earth. A key point in this chapter is the unity of God's people. This is evident most clearly in the metaphor of the olive tree. The olive tree was an old symbol for Israel, and here Paul uses it to show the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles. Just as a new olive shoot can be grafted onto an old olive plant, the Gentiles have been grafted into Israel. Now a lot of people think that one of the major events of the New Testament was the establishment of the church. This is recorded in Acts when the Holy Spirit came upon the new believers. They became empowered to preach the gospel, and thousands were converted. Acts records how the new believers were organized into the church, with the apostles, evangelists, prophets, elders, and deacons, taking leadership roles. Thus was born the new people of God – the church.

Now all this is true, and I am not denying the significance of the new work of God by His Spirit at Pentecost and in the years following. But it's also true that this new work of the Spirit was a continuation of the eternal work of the Spirit of saving the people of God. Scripture talks of the church early in the Old Testament, and as Paul says here, the Gentiles were added into the people of God who had believed in Him from the beginning. What is particularly important is that Jews and Gentiles are now part of the same church. There is no salvation outside of the church. Jews and Gentiles alike are saved by believing in Christ and are then incorporated into His body the church.

One of the implications of this is that Israel as a separate nation has no significance for salvation. The New Testament applies the promises and blessings God gave to Israel now to the church. For instance, in 1 Peter 2:9-10, God describes the church this way:

You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have

obtained mercy.

Do you recognize that description? That is how God described Israel in Exodus 19:5-6. Believers in Christ have been added into the people of God, and now we all are called the church.

Where does this leave the modern nation of Israel? It's a refuge for many Jewish people. It's a solid ally of the United States. But it's nothing special when it comes to salvation. We ought to deal fairly with Israel, as with all nations. WE should support them and honor our treaties – but not because they are God's chosen people, for Israel the nation isn't God's chosen people. The church is. In our foreign policy, we should act with justice and mercy toward Israel, and Afghanistan, and Iraq, and even France.

revival

Conclusion

God' love in choosing you
warning
your love for friends, for Jews

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