

Grafted Into the Remnant

Romans 11:11-24

August 14, 2011

We saw last week that God has not completely rejected His people due to their sin, but has kept a remnant for Himself. Of course, Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, so he was led to ask how this remnant is related to the fact that the church was becoming increasingly Gentile during, and because of, his ministry. So, to what extent was Israel rejected by God, and how were the Gentiles coming onto God's Kingdom to view and relate to them? These are the questions Paul answers in this morning's text.

Still speaking of Israel, Paul says, "*Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.*" (v.11)

God often has motives beyond what we can see. Israel had rejected Jesus, just as they had rejected the prophets. God had showered His love and grace on them, and still they refused to follow His way. So God, in His grace and wisdom, did three things in His rejection of them. He punished them for their obstinance. He opened the door for the Gentiles. He also aroused envy in Israel. Israel had thought they deserved God's love and salvation and to have their righteousness based on the law recognized by God. Of course, they were not righteous and did not follow the law. Part of the reason God brought salvation to the Gentiles while rejecting Israel was so that Israel could see the Gentiles receiving as a gift the righteousness for which they had worked so long.

God often has **motives** of which we are unaware when He brings situations into our lives. He certainly does work on us to increase our dependance on Him. He also will work in us in order to have an impact on somebody else. Sometimes He uses our suffering to prepare us to help others who deal with the same thing.

Sometimes He softens our hearts so we can be more merciful with those in need. Sometimes, as with Job, He merely tests and tries us so that others can see our faith and how it sustains and carries us through the darkest hours of life. Even when God is dealing with you, it's not about you. He has larger motives and is working for His glory.

As we saw last week, God is not done with Israel. Last week we saw that there is a remnant of Israel which God has not rejected. Most of Israel may have rejected God's way, but Israel remains. Paul points out, "*[I]f their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!*" (v.12) If God's grace, holiness, and glory are shown throughout the world as they treasures they are through His adoption of the Gentiles instead of Israel, how much more will they be demonstrated when He restores His people! God had intended Israel to share Him with the world. They were to be a beacon, a light to all the nations. If they would not cooperate, He would find another way to use them. Still, as His chosen people, and the means of His provision of salvation to the world, His glory would shine so much brighter when Israel, too, submitted to His way and came into the new covenant.

Paul moved on. "*I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?*" (vv.13-15) Just like God, Paul had two motives for working very hard to win the Gentiles, even though he was a Jew. Paul wanted to serve God to the best of his ability so he worked hard to take the gospel of salvation to the people to whom God had sent him. He also worked with God to arouse envy in his own people.

It is true that envy is usually a sin. We are not to be envious of the material possessions others have. We are not to be envious of their station in life or the blessings God has given them. It is good, however, to be **envious** after God. We ought to desire the same kind of relationship with God that the apostles had, or even that Jesus had, and we ought to pursue that relationship with all that we are. To covet God and a deeper relationship with Him is not a bad thing.

Again, if Israel's rejection of God meant that salvation would spread to the world, what would happen when they stop rejecting God and turn back to their refuge and hope? If their rejection meant the world could be reconciled to God, then their acceptance would have the same impact as resurrection. It would be spiritual life where there was only death! God is wondrous in the ways He **works!**

"If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches." (v.16) What comes after is related to what comes before. If a piece torn out is holy, then that from which it was torn is holy. If a root is holy, then the branches that live off it's sap are holy. Holy things do not produce common things. Holy roots produce holy **branches** which bear holy fruit.

Paul moves to two images here that have to deal with horticulture. The first is the Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah, specifically that he would be a root from Jesse. Isaiah wrote, *"In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious."* (Isaiah 11:10) Just as the Israeli people were branches from the root of the patriarchs, and the Messiah began as a branch from that root through Jesse, the Messiah himself would be a new root to which the nations would come.

The second image comes from Jesus. *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I*

in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) The branches draw from the vine and root and receive their nature. If what comes from the vine is good, the branches will produce, if they are properly attached. It is to this point that Paul turned next.

"If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you." (vv.17,18) As Gentiles we have been added late, from wild stock, to an already cultivated tree. This is a hard thing to do. We do not, then get to boast that branches had to be broken off of this carefully prepared and cultivated tree in order to make room for us. We are only there because the tree was cultivated to begin with and out of the kindness and generosity of the Gardiner.

As the church we cannot stand with pride and say we are better than the Jews, though many in the church over the years have tried. It is a grave sin and one for which the church will have to answer. We can only be saved because of the Jews. Jesus was a Jew, a descendant of Jesse, through David, of the tribe of Judah. Did the Jews kill the Messiah? Yes, but only because He is one of them. It is through the Jews that salvation comes. We have no place to feel superior or to condemn them. As Paul said, we cannot boast over them. Indeed over what can we boast? That God showed His mercy to us too? That is hardly a reason to look down on them.

Many from Israel were rejected, leaving only a remnant. Those branches were cut off. Now we have been grafted in among the ones which were left. We now share the same **sap**, the promises and mercy of God, that fed the patriarchs and the Israelites for millennia. We are latecomers and are supported by the foundation, not the other way around.

Many say that God is doing something new and they look down on those they see as stuck in the old ways. This was true of the early church as they tried to work out their relationship to the law and to the Jewish foundation of a church that was increasingly becoming Gentile. This is true of the church's mistreatment of the Jews. It is true of many today who seek to set aside the commands of God and the historic gospel in order to make it easier for people today to believe and accept. In addressing the first one, Paul addressed them all.

"You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.' Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either." (vv.19-21) God has always dealt with His people in the same way. In His mercy He rescues them and offers them life, and then He punishes them when they reject Him. We must not use His rejection of Israel as a cause of celebration that we are somehow better. We must use it as a sober reminder that, if God could reject most of them, there is nothing to keep Him from turning His back on us too. Likewise, many people in the church think that God is leading them down a new path and are rejecting the grace of God. They reject His word placing their own opinions above what God has said. They look at His commands and say they are not bound by them. They presume on God's grace.

If God did not spare Israel, He most certainly will not spare those who butcher His word, call evil good and sin blessing, and who set their own thoughts above what God has revealed about His thoughts. If there was a judgement for Israel, there will be a judgement for all who misuse and abuse God's word in the name of a "freedom" that is really licentiousness. We don't get to set the rules or the terms. **God** does. We bow the knee before Him and thank Him that His wrath has not yet destroyed us. We thank Him for His mercy and enjoy

the freedom we have as His children to live as He intends for us to live and to obediently follow His word and His way.

Paul moved on to make this clear. *"Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!"* (vv.22-24) God has done a remarkable and unnatural thing in the Gentiles He has chosen to save. They have been grafted onto a tree to which they don't belong. This is an example of both God's stern wrath, and of His kind mercy.

Paul invites us to look at both sides of God's relationship with His people. There is the sternness of God which is toward those who fall from His way, rejecting Him and going off in their own direction. There is also God's kindness which is shown to all who submit to and continue in His way. We must hold these two together. None of us is perfect, and God is perfectly just in doing anything with us that He desires. He would be well within His rights to cast us off, just as He did disobedient Israel. He is also within His rights to hold us fast to the tree into which we have grafted all who come to Him in repentance.

Paul points out that, if Israel were to repent and return to God's way, that He would graft them back in as well. If we, being wild branches can be grafted onto the tree of God's grace, how much more can the branches that were cut from that tree be grafted back onto it! There is always hope because God is always **able**. We do not find our hope in the government. The last several years have demonstrated that to us very clearly. We

cannot put our hope in our money. That, too, has been shown to be true recently. We dare not put our trust in ourselves for we are weak bodied and weak willed.

There is only one place where we can put our trust, and that is in God who is able to graft us, through the Holy Spirit, into the root of His people and thus bring us to salvation. We are called to join Israel, repent of our ways, and set our feet on the path God places before us. We must live our lives connected to Jesus as our source, or we will be cut off and cast into the fire of God's wrath. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. There is no life for those who are outside of Him.

Of course, since God can save us, He can save Israel as well. Even though they rejected Jesus, and have thus been rejected by God, there is still the truth that they can be redeemed. As we said, it is easier for them to be saved than us because it is through them and the promises God made to them that our salvation came. We will see as Paul continues with this thought next week.