

FAILURE AND FAITHFULNESS
ROMANS 11:11-16

The past four months of COVID-19 and unrighteous killings and riots have led to many questions, and few answers. Many questions have not just been asked about our political leaders, but also about God. All the questions about God might be summarized by three questions asked by a Christian author three decades ago about God:

- ✓ Is God unfair?
- ✓ Is God silent?
- ✓ Is God hidden?

Those questions might also be summarized by one fundamental question about God: Is God faithful to His promises and Himself? Will He do what He says? That is Paul's question in Romans 11. The background to that chapter is that Israel failed: the corporate decision by Israel about Jesus Christ was that He was not the Messiah and, even worse, He was an agent of Satan — **Mt. 12:23-24**. That decision persisted after His death, resurrection, and ascension. When Paul went to a new city in his travels, he would begin by evangelizing the Jews in the Synagogue, and he was repeatedly rejected (**Acts 13:46; 14:1-2; 18:6; 19:8-9; 28:28**). That Israel persisted in unbelief is also clear in this letter to the Romans (**9:1-3; 10:1-3**).

If you know your OT, you know that God chose the nation of Israel to be His eternal covenant people. But if Israel has rejected God, then the natural question is, has God failed? Have His promises failed, and is God incompetent to accomplish His plans? That is the issue Paul is addressing in Romans 11; he unequivocally states that God has *not* failed; the rejection by Israel has *not* undermined God's plan, and that God will *still* redeem the nation of Israel. The passage before us this morning is Romans 11:11-16, which states,

FAILURE BY ISRAEL DOES NOT PRECLUDE FAITHFULNESS BY GOD.

EVEN WHEN ISRAELITES REJECT GOD, GOD WILL STILL KEEP HIS PROMISE TO ISRAEL.

In this passage, Paul provides us with **three affirmations of God's faithfulness** to Israel and Himself:

CONTEXT: A reminder of the message of Romans 11

1. **Israel's Rejection of God Does **NOT** Invalidate God's Promise (v. 11a)**
2. **Israel's Rejection of God Leads to God's Salvation of **GENTILES** (vv. 11b, 12a)**
3. **God's Salvation of Gentiles Leads to God's Salvation of **ISRAEL** (vv. 11c, 12b-16)**
 - ✓ God's **PURPOSE** for Being Gracious to Gentiles (v. 11c)
 - ✓ God's **RICH** Faithfulness to Israel (v. 12)
 - ✓ God's **REMnant** Faithfulness to Israel (vv. 13-14)
 - ✓ God's **RESURRECTION** Faithfulness to Israel (v. 15)
 - ✓ God's Faithfulness to Israel, **ILLUSTRATED** (v. 16)

Lessons learned:

FAILURE BY ISRAEL DOES NOT PRECLUDE FAITHFULNESS BY GOD.

EVEN WHEN ISRAELITES REJECT GOD, GOD WILL STILL KEEP HIS PROMISE TO ISRAEL.

CONTEXT: A reminder of the message of Romans 11:

- ✓ **Verse 1** asks if God has rejected Israel, and Paul could not be more emphatic that He hasn't.
- ✓ **Verse 2** serves as the theme for this entire chapter. Paul's statement is simple, clear, and concise. His meaning is unmistakable, and it is repeated throughout the chapter:
 - There is a remnant (**v. 5**)
 - They did not stumble in a way that made them fall out of God's blessing (**v. 11a**)
 - There will still be fulfillment of God's promises for them (**v. 12**)
 - The hardening of the Israelites was for the purpose of grafting in Gentiles (**v. 25**; cf. v. 11b)
 - The Deliverer will come and take away their sins and show them mercy (**vv. 26-27, 30**)
 - No wonder Paul exclaims God's glory in his benediction in **vv. 33-36**.
- ✓ Remember that Paul is speaking about three distinct groups of Israelites in this chapter:
 - He is speaking of *individuals* who have rejected Christ and been hardened (**vv. 7b-10**)
 - He is speaking of *individuals* who have received grace from God — a remnant (**vv. 5, 14**)
 - He is speaking of the *nation*, as an entire nation, that will be saved (**vv. 1, 2, 7a, 11ff**)

In this passage, Paul provides us with three affirmations of God's faithfulness to Israel and Himself.

1. Israel's Rejection of God Does NOT Invalidate God's Promise (v. 11a)

- In vv. 7-10, Israel is divided into two factions: the hardened, and the remnant. The question of v. 11 is, "Is the division and situation permanent? Is Israel's rejection enough to put them outside the Promise?"
 - ✓ Paul acknowledges that the nation has ***stumbled*** — they have strayed into sin and are culpable.
 - ✓ The question is whether that sin is enough to make them ***fall*** permanently out of God's promise. Have they committed an irredeemable sin that led to an irrevocable fall?
- Paul could not be more emphatic — ***may it never be!*** This is the phrase he uses frequently when he contemplates something that is preposterous (10x — e.g., 3:31; 6:2, 15; 7:7; **11:1**).
 - ✓ How can Paul be so sure? That's what he will unfold in vv. 11-16, but also remember that in vv. 7b-10 Paul is speaking of individuals; in v. 11, he resumes talking about the nation of Israel. God is doing two different things with the nation and with individuals in it. Even though individuals are hardened, that does not invalidate the plan God has for the nation.
 - ✓ This emphatic denial is a reminder of God's faithfulness to Himself and the truth. We are often tempted in trials to forget and question or deny God's faithfulness. "Don't give up in the dark what God has revealed in the light." He is faithful. Always interpret your situation in light of that truth.

2. Israel's Rejection of God Leads to God's Salvation of GENTILES (vv. 11b, 12a)

- In contrast to the idea that Israel might have sinned in a way that led to God forsaking her, Paul says something else is happening through her sin of rejecting God. He uses the word **but** to indicate that.
 - ✓ It is true they sinned — **their transgression** refers to a “misstep” — they went the wrong way.
 - ✓ There was also a result of their sin, but not what one might expect. The result of their sin was that **salvation has come to the Gentiles**. The salvation here is spiritual salvation (1:16-17).
 - ✓ **Gentiles** were not part of God's covenant with Israel. The promise was to Israel, no one else. *But* the rest of the world was to be blessed through Israel (Gen. 12:3; cf. Rom. 9:25-26).
 - ✓ So from one nation's sin, many nations (and people) are blessed, so that Heaven contains not only the nation of Israel, but representatives of every people group (Eph. 2:14-16; 3:4-6; Rev. 5:9-10; 7:9). The tree of life in Heaven is not for the healing of the nation, but the *nations* (Rev. 22:2).
- Notice also that God did this through Israel's sin, which implies at least two things:
 - ✓ Sin cannot undo or prevent the accomplishment of God's plans. If God has decreed, it will happen.
 - ✓ God redeems and uses the worst things to accomplish His purposes. While Paul doesn't use the word “redemption” here, that's what he's talking about. God buys and uses sin (Acts 2:23-24).
 - ✓ That should make us hopeful of our situation as Gentiles, and for our situation as sinners.

3. God's Salvation of Gentiles Leads to God's Salvation of ISRAEL (vv. 11c, 12b-16)

- God's PURPOSE for Being Gracious to Gentiles (v. 11c)
 - ✓ Why did God use Israel's sin to give salvation to the Gentiles? His purpose was **to make them jealous**.
 - Paul is using the concept of Deut. 32:21, which he already quoted in 10:19.
 - Salvation has been granted to the Gentiles in order to provoke jealousy in Israel, so that Israel also will want the blessing of believing in the Messiah who was provided for Israel's salvation. This is not an unrighteous jealousy; Israel belongs to God and she should desire the relationship God has designed for her, and she should long for and be jealous for that relationship.
 - ✓ Let's think about this in two ways:
 1. *It's a tremendous sorrow that Israel has rejected Christ.* But it's also a great sorrow that too often Gentiles (that's us) have failed to make Israel envious. We have failed to live and evangelize in a way that attracts them to Christ. We haven't been purposeful in attracting them. Do we entice them to say, “why are you so kind...so generous...seek forgiveness...understanding?”
 2. Perhaps a greater sorrow is that the church has too often been guilty of driving Israel away from Christ through evil hatred and prejudice. We were redeemed *from* ethnic hatred and anti-Semitism, and too many have remained there. Remember that our salvation is not just about us — it is given to us to attract sinners to Christ, even (especially) Israel.
 - “Christians should not take this passage calmly.” [Morris]

- God's **RICH** Faithfulness to Israel (v. 12)

- ✓ When Paul says, **Now if...**, he means, "Now since..." It's a reality; what he's about to say has happened.
- ✓ Paul uses two different phrases to say the same thing:
 - **Their transgression is riches for the world** = Their "misstep" has made the riches of salvation available to the world (it doesn't mean every person in the world is saved).
 - **Their failure is riches for the Gentiles** = Their "utter loss" has made the riches of salvation available to Gentiles.
 - The terms **world** and **Gentiles** point to the *population* of the world and their "religion."
 - As in v. 11, Paul is talking about God buying and using sin to accomplish good and blessing.
- ✓ But the richness of salvation for Gentiles is not the end of the story: **how much more...**
 - Not only will Israel receive riches in salvation, but they will receive "much more" in the completion of God's covenant promises with her.
 - Paul likes these "much more" comparisons — cf. **5:8-10** — if a dead Savior can accomplish redemption, how much more will a living Savior provide for us!
 - Here, if a faithless Israel can bring about salvation for Gentiles, how much more will a faithful Israel accomplish?! Israel will reign with God, Satan will be bound, the heavens and earth will be renewed, only justice will be done on the earth, and peace will reign (**Rev. 22:3-6**).
- ✓ The (temporary) unbelief of the nation is not the final word in the book; there are unimaginable riches of salvation that are yet coming to Israel.

- God's **REMNANT** Faithfulness to Israel (vv. 13-14)

- ✓ Paul is looking forward to a future day. But what about now? What about the present ministry?
- ✓ Even though that final day of redemption for Israel was for Paul (and still is today also) still future, one might ask the question, "Well why are you working so hard for the salvation of Israel, Paul? Why do you keep going to synagogues and attempting to save Jews?"
- ✓ Quite simple. While Paul was **an apostle of Gentiles**, he **magnified my ministry** — he exalted and made it as big as possible, not for self-pride, but to provoke **jealousy** of the Jews (**v. 14**). And if he makes them jealous for his salvation, then they will repent and trust Christ.
- ✓ Notice that he says that his desire is that God might **save some of them**. When he says "some" it is clear that he doesn't think that his ministry will result in the final salvation of the nation as a nation, but he does envision that individuals will repent and believe — so a remnant of individuals will be saved (**9:27**). He wants all Israel to be saved (**10:1**), but he is also willing to work for the remnant.
- ✓ The importance of the remnant is that it reminds us that God hasn't forsaken Israel (**11:1b, 4**).
- ✓ Paul is saying, "God hasn't given up on Israel, and I haven't either. As I pursue Israelites for evangelism, Gentiles will be saved when Israel rejects, but some Israelites will also believe!"
- ✓ Similarly, we want "the world" to believe, but we should work for and rejoice over the one (Lk. 15).

- God's **RESURRECTION** Faithfulness to Israel (v. 15)

- ✓ Notice the connection in v. 15 — why should Paul work for the jealousy of some? **For** (because), there is a certainty that awaits them.
- ✓ He explains the certainty with the clause **if their rejection...** The clause is certain — “since their rejection...” And what is certain is that through the rejection of Christ by Israel, salvation came to the world and *offered* reconciliation to the world.
 - As in v. 12, the reconciliation is not of every single person in the world, but that it is made available to every single person in the world.
 - When Paul talks about **reconciliation** he is talking about bringing two different entities together and making them one. There are a few possibilities of what that reconciliation is:
 - ... It could be the reconciliation that happens between Jew and Gentile when they are made one body of Christ (ethnic reconciliation, Eph. 2:14-18).
 - ... It could be the reconciliation that happens between God and man (2 Cor. 5:18a, 19)
 - ... It could be the ministry of declaring reconciliation to the world (2 Cor. 5:18b, 20)
 - ... It's unclear what Paul is speaking of here, other than to say that even though Israel has rejected Christ, that rejection has resulted in a wealth of reconciliation.
- ✓ But something even greater happens through Israel's rejection — one day they will be **accepted**. They have rejected, but God will still **accept** the nation — He will welcome and embrace her as a beloved son (15:7; exemplified in Lk. 15:22-24).
- ✓ This acceptance is both *from* God and *to* God. God gives it and God is the object of it. The goal of acceptance from God is to get believers to Him.
- ✓ And then notice what the full nature of this acceptance is: **life from the dead**.
 - Israel not only has “acceptance,” she is **alive**! This reveals the utter lostness of what they didn't have when they didn't have Christ, and the fulness of what they have with Him.
 - This doesn't mean that Gentiles don't have life in Christ (they do — chs. 6-8), but it is Paul's way to emphasize the complete and full destitute nature of the lostness of Israel.
 - It could be that Paul is talking about “resurrection from the dead” — final resurrection (Rev. 20).
 - More likely, he is talking about resurrection life that is found in Christ — the kind of life promised for Israel by Ezekiel 37:1-14, this morning's opening Scripture reading.
 - Either way, those who were as dead as dead could be, are not thriving with real life.
- ✓ In God's faithfulness, Israel can be sure she will still receive riches, a remnant, and resurrection.

- God's Faithfulness to Israel, **ILLUSTRATED** (v. 16)

- ✓ To demonstrate God's faithfulness, Paul uses two illustrations:
 - **first...lump** — **First piece** is often translated “first fruit” and infers that the character of the first denotes the character of the remaining; this also refers to the leaven offering (Num. 15:19ff).

- **root...branches** = Unholy branches will not come from a holy root; if the root is holy and justified, then those that follow from that root also will receive what he received — life.
- ✓ Both illustrations demonstrate that if the “first fruits” of Israel are saved and have life, then what follows from those first fruits will also be alive. He means us to understand that if the patriarchs of Israel (and particularly Abraham) were holy and received the promise, then the nation that follows them also will. God cannot be faithful to Abraham and unfaithful to Israel.
- ✓ Isaiah says something similar — **Is. 51:1-3**; since Abraham was holy (justified) and guaranteed the promise, Israel can be confident that God will also be faithful to her. He is faithful.

4. Lessons LEARNED

- **God is faithful.** Whatever hardness individual Israelites experienced not only produced salvation for the Gentiles, but also led to the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel (**vv. 12, 15, 23, 26, 31**).
 - ✓ God is in control. Even though the nation of Israel rejected the message of Christ, even that rejection is being used by God to ultimately bring them back.
 - ✓ God’s plans cannot be thwarted; and that gives one peace in living the Christian life on a daily basis, for even when one sins, he cannot ruin God’s sovereign plans.
- **Be thankful for your salvation; don’t be self-righteously proud.**
 - ✓ Paul wrote this section to keep the Gentiles from unrighteous pride (cf. **vv. 17-18**).
 - ✓ We have been given a gift of grace and that gift should always lead to gratitude and never pride.
 - ✓ Grace always means “I don’t deserve this,” which also means, “I have no reason for pride.”
- **Live in such a way that your salvation makes Israel (and others) jealous for salvation.**
 - ✓ One reason that some do not want Christ is because of the way we, Christ’s people, live.
 - ✓ Sometimes (but not always), those accusations against believers are justified. Our lives should be a constant source of provocation for those who don’t yet believe (e.g., **1 Pt. 2:12; 3:15-16**).
- **Don’t give up praying and evangelizing.**
 - ✓ The story of Israel is not yet finished. God *will* redeem the nation and keep His promise.
 - ✓ The story of your loved one who does not yet believe is not finished either. There is still an opportunity to believe, and God loves to save sinners (**Rom. 5:8**). Keep speaking the gospel.

BENEDICTION: **Romans 11:33-36**