

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 11, Verses 1-10
Notes from Tuesday February 22, 2011
Last Revised on February 25, 2011

Songs

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for allowing us, sinners all, to continue to gather as we are doing now.

Thank you for allowing us to open up your Bible and read your holy words.

Thank you for having spoken these words to your people in the first place,

“at many times and in many ways by the prophets

but in these last days by your son,

whom you have appointed heir of all things,

and through whom you have also created the world.”(Hb. 1:1)

Help us to hear the voice of Jesus this night,

for we read that *“faith comes from hearing,*

and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Rom. 10:17)

Help us to know and to remember, O Lord,

that our only righteousness comes from faith,

faith which you, and only you, can give us,

from your mouth, graciously, as a free gift.

Please speak to us again this evening O Lord,

and grant us more faith.

In Jesus name we pray,

Amen.

Introduction

This evening we continue our study of the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Last week we finished reading Chapter 10.

Tonight we will read on into Chapter 11.

But first let's review a little.

And may God help us!

(I am sorry that things were a little confusing last week.)

Review

As we have repeatedly reminded ourselves,

the **overall** theme of Paul's letter to the Romans is ... the **gospel**,

which is God's good news concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,

who has come to save us, by giving his life as an atonement for our sin.

Our sinfulness and how God in Christ saves us from it, the gospel proper,

is set forth in the first **four chapters** of this letter.

In **Chapters 5-8** Paul goes on to discuss the happy situation of those being saved by it,

ending with the remarkable statement that absolutely nothing, ... ***will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.***"

Here Paul expresses the eternal joy that believers can have amidst their present suffering.

We should hope that each person here and all people everywhere come to know this joy.

Yet we know that not all people do know this joy, not even all of us here tonight,

and perhaps none of us nearly as well or as constantly as we might.

So we turn with interest to the next section of Paul's Letter to the Romans,

that is **Chapter 9-11** where Paul examines the sad situation of **Jews** who **reject** the gospel.

This is the **section** of Paul's letter which we are reading presently.

And it a section of the letter both difficult and important.

Long before we arrive at this section of the letter,

indeed from the very beginning of this letter,

Paul has emphasized that the Gospel is about the coming of Christ,

who is descended from David, King of the Jews,

and that this news came first to the Jews and, only then, also to the gentiles,

and that this news came in such a way as to favor and bless the Jews exceedingly,

beyond other men, throughout their long and extraordinary history.

They were the visible church, *ekklesia*, God's called out ones, until Christ.

They zealously pursued God and his righteousness as they understood it.

Yet the fact is that most of the Jews until this very day, have rejected Christ.

This naturally raises the question of why this is the case,

and of what the implications are,

for the Jews themselves,

and for the gentiles.

That is what Paul is grappling with in Chapters 9, 10, and 11.

Please follow along with me now as I, once again, **review** Chapters **9** and **10**

before heading on into Chapter 11.

Paul begins in **Chapter 9, Verses 1-5**, by speaking of his deep **sadness** for his fellow Jews,

by which he evidently means his **living genetic** kinsmen,

almost all of whom continued to reject Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

This might suggest that there was something **wrong** with the Gospel that Paul proclaimed,

that the word of God had somehow **failed** because almost all of God's people,

virtually the entire visible church of God at that time, had rejected it.

But in **Verses 6-13 of Chapter 9** Paul reminds his readers that just the **opposite** is true.

God has **always** preserved his relationship with the children of Abraham,

through a small **remnant**,

not because the remnant was good,

but because **this** is how God operates!

In view of how God operates,

some of us may be so thoughtless and foolish as to accuse Him of **injustice**:

because not everyone receives the same favors from God.

But in **Verses 14-18 of Chapter 9** Paul challenges his readers to understand,

that this is a faulty way of thinking about God,

whose every action is always and everywhere gracious,

even when he hardens some men for the benefit of others,

be it the Pharaoh of Egypt or the vast majority of Jews in Paul's day,

 God knows what he is doing!

 But if all these things are ordained by God,

 including the hardening of certain men,

 then why does God find fault with us?

 How can we possibly resist his will?

 In **Verses 19-29 of Chapter 9** Paul challenges us to understand and acknowledge that this is an **improper question**.

 Not merely impertinent but unreasonable.

 When we ask it, we demonstrate that we have not yet understood our relationship to God.

 which is one of **absolute** dependence.

 I am reminded of the words of Christ, quoted in the third chapters of both Matthew and Luke, where Jesus remarks that God could make children for Abraham out of the **stones**.

 That is basically what God does whenever he saves one of **us!**

 God does not **need** us for anything. He takes nothing **from** us. He **owes** us nothing.

 We on the other hand depend on God for absolutely **everything**.

 Paul ends **Chapter 9 (Verses 30-33)** by stating quite clearly that almost all of Israel has failed to obtain the righteousness which it had been seeking, while some gentiles had found such righteousness without even looking for it, precisely because righteousness can only come from God, by grace, through faith.

 It can only be had as a **free** gift from God, and never in return for any merit in the **recipient**.

 This is the gospel, which is the best possible news for miserable sinners,

 but **not** good news at all for those of us who wish to be righteous in and of ourselves.

(And may God forgive us!)

Such righteousness is not **possible**.

That is why **Israel** failed.

This is how Paul begins **Chapter 10**, in the **first 4 verses**

speaking of that “*zeal for God*” which is “*not according to knowledge.*”

The Jews thought that they could make **themselves** righteous by obeying the law,

thereby **obligating** God, in some sense, to forgive them, and to bless them,

while at the same time rejecting the **One** who alone makes righteousness possible.

This has **always** and everywhere been the mistake of **Israel**, and of the **Church**

That is the sense of **Verses 5-13 of Chapter 10**,

where Paul, appealing to Old Testament Scriptures,

challenges his readers to recognize and understand,

that the one and **only** way to righteousness,

has always been ... **simply**... to call on the name of the Lord.

Abraham knew it, Moses knew it, David knew it, as did countless others.

Perhaps the best proof of this is found in the fact that even **Gentiles** can do it!

That even the most dissolute **sinner**s can suddenly turn to Christ and be eternally saved!

In Verse 13, of Chapter 10, Paul quotes from Joel 2:32: “*For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’*”

There Joel is speaking of the **last days**, when God’s spirit will be poured out on “all flesh” (Joel 2:28)

In Acts 2:17 the Apostle Peter quotes precisely this same passage to explain the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of **Pentecost**.

Therefore in some sense it is right to understand that we are **already** living in the last days of which Joel spoke: Christ has risen, and God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, has already been poured out, and indeed "*everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*"

Joel and Paul to some extent may also have in mind the **parousia** (or "second coming") of Christ, when in the most final and ultimate sense, "*everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*"

The key thing here, at this point in the letter, is that **salvation** absolutely depends on "*calling on the name of the Lord*"

So in **Verses 14-17 of Chapter 10**, Paul looks at the several conditions which are necessary and sufficient for our salvation:

To be **saved** we must **call** on the name of the Lord,

To truly **call** on the name of the Lord, we must first truly **believe** in him,

To **believe** in him we must first effectively hear Christ **speak** to us

Which may **possibly** happen in various ways (all of them miraculous)

But which **usually** happens through the **preaching**

of those whom Christ has **sent**,

such as **apostles** and **prophets**

whose words are recorded in holy **Scripture**.

Jesus is on all sides of this: he is the one on whom we **call**, the one who first **speaks** to us to give us faith, and the one who **sends** those through whom he speaks to us. And he is the One spoken **about** --- i.e. the **content** of the gospel message.

This is no less true in the **Old** Testament than in the **New** Testament!

Verse 17 of Chapter 10 accurately summarizes the means of our salvation,

"Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ."

So, then, Paul logically proceeds to ask in Verse 18,

Who has heard the word of Christ?

The answer, in some sense, is “everyone has” because here Paul quotes Psalm 19,

which tells of how God effectively speaks to us in and through his creation

All men, both gentiles and Jews, have been addressed by Christ in those ways,

Therefore when Christ became flesh and dwelt among us,

even some gentiles were able to recognize him as God.

But why, then, did most Jews,

who had so much more information about God,

fail to recognize Christ when he came?

In the first part of Verse 19 Paul asks, “*did they not understand?*”

Please look with me there

(Verse 19a)

But I ask, did Israel not understand?

Paul then answers by quoting loosely from Biblical prophesy.

First from Moses who says:

(Verse 19b)

[First Moses says,] **"I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry."**

Then from Isaiah who is so bold as to say:

(Verse 20)

[Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,] **"I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."**

Paul means to say, I think, that the rejection of Christ by most Jews,

despite the fact that even some gentiles are able to understand who Christ is and accept the salvation which he offers,

represents the outworking of God's plan,

as foreseen in the prophesy of Moses and Isaiah.

God has opened the eyes of the gentiles so as to make Israel jealous and angry,

which is, in part, the just punishment of Israel for its long disobedience to God.

Of Israel God says:

(Verse 21)

[But of Israel he says,]"**All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.**"

Surely this is a fair description (anthropomorphism) of God's relationship with Israel,

and also of God's relationship with the Church, down through history.

He holds out his hands to us,

We flagrantly ignore him,

And so he allows us to remain blind and deaf to him for a time.

He hardens us, so that "seeing we do not see"

and "hearing we do not hear."

And this leads naturally to the question of whether we shall remain blind and deaf forever.

Here Paul is considering primarily the blind and the deaf among his own living kinsmen.

But this passage is, I believe, ripe with implications for all of God's people.

Let's read on, now, into Chapter 11

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 11, Verses 1-10

Will someone please read Romans, Chapter 11, Verses 1-10 in Japanese.

Thank you. Now will someone please read those same verses in English.

1 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

2 God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel?

3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life."

4 But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

7 What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,

8 as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day."

9 And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them;

10 let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever."

Thank you.

Remember from what we have read and reviewed from Chapters 9 and 10,

that Paul views the blindness and deafness of Israel to the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

as part of God's eternal plan, long foreseen and foretold by Moses and Isaiah,

which is God's just punishment for Israel's past infidelity and transgression,

and his gracious gift to the Gentiles now coming into the church to embarrass Israel.

It would certainly be more than just if God were to allow Israel to remain blind and deaf.

Is that what God is doing?

Some in history have thought so, but the Apostle Paul disagrees.

Verse 1 reads:

(Verse 1)

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

By "his people" I believe that Paul here means the Nation of Israel as they understood themselves --- i.e. descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob with, perhaps, certain subtractions and additions along the way.

"Are the lot of us rejected?" Paul asks.

To which he gives an immediate, strong, and unequivocal negative answer.

Such a thing --- for Israel to be rejected --- is not possible. Unthinkable.

Paul offers himself as an example, which he has not done much before now.

But he does not mean to say, simply, that the fact of him being both a Christian and a Jew proves something.

He means to say that he himself, a very Jewish man, indeed so zealously Jewish that he at first persecuted and imprisoned Christians, and stood by approving of the brutal death of Stephen, had been chosen by Christ himself and in person, and given special responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles, and to the Jews, with effect.

The existence of the several churches which Paul established, consisting as they do of both Jewish and Gentile converts, is proof that Paul was sent by God and anointed by him to proclaim the gospel.

Such a thing would never happen if God had simply written off all disobedient Jews,

of whom Paul himself was most certainly one!

Certainly Paul, himself, and the other Apostles, and others like them had made the transition from the blindness and deafness which was characteristic of the best and most godly Jews to being true believers and followers of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

So God must not be simply finished with Israel.

Verse 2 continues

(Verse 2)

God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel?

Elsewhere Paul speaks of himself as being separated from birth to the gospel ministry,

though his path from the womb to being the man we know as an Apostle of Christ,

involved several decades of his being zealous but not according to knowledge.

Following his conversion, other Christians were afraid of him for a time, because it was difficult to believe that Paul truly was Christian.

Yet God always knew what Paul would become and such foreknowledge is never set aside.

This is the eternal mystery of election which is mostly hidden from the eyes of men.

Paul does not mean to hold himself forward as the signal example,

his thoughts naturally travel to the story of Elijah,

and he asks his readers to remember this also.

Elijah said:

(Verse 3)

"Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life."

Surly there have been few men in history who had keener spiritual sight than Elijah.

Yet even his eyes could not find a single person in Israel, other than himself,

who remained faithful to God.

He saw everywhere only complete apostasy.

Yet God had his own secrets.

Verse 4 reads:

(Verse 4)

But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

This passage is sometimes read to emphasize the smallness of the remnant that God had kept,

but I think we are supposed to read it the other way round.

Seven thousand is not a literal number, but a figurative one,

Representing fullness and perfection and, I think, plenitude.

I think God is saying that, where you see nothing left, I see very much indeed.

And this is not just a random designation.

God has not merely said "I will save many who are apostate"

He has said that I have saved many from apostasy!

"Despite what you see," Elijah, "I have many people in this place whom I foreknew, and who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

There are many who are redeemable and whom I will redeem, says the Lord.

At least that is the reading of this verse that I prefer.

And how you read it is important, because it is not of merely historical interest.

Paul applies this passage in the following verse

Verse 5 reads:

(Verse 5)

So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

Paul is not the only one in Israel who is surprisingly part of the Church,

though he may be one of the most visible.

There are are others, just like in the time of Elijah,

and there may be (and I think probably are) many others,

and many if not most of them, perhaps, hidden from human eyes.

In any case, the number is perfect and known only by God.

And each one of these was known by God before the beginning of the universe.

“God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.”(2a)

Verse 6 continues:

(Verse 6)

But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

We are again reminded,

and Paul never tires of reminding us,

that nobody in the Church, Jew or gentile, is in the Church because they are good.

We are **not** good.

There **are** no “good Christians”

“God alone is good.” (Mk10.18)

What does this mean, then, for Israel?!

We read in Verse 7 that..

(Verse 7b)

[What then?] **Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking.**

Q. What was Israel seeking?

A. The Kingdom of God

Q. How did they seek it?

A. Religious (human) activity.

But this is impossible.

So Israel failed in this pursuit: "Game Over" permanently

This is a permanent example and warning to the Church.

But as we have already seen, this does not meant that "*God has rejected his people.*"

On the contrary, Paul says, "*God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.*"

We read in the last part of Verse 7

(Verse 7c)

The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,

So within all that is visible as Israel, almost all of which is apparently lost,

there is hidden the remnant which God, by grace, has kept for himself,

but as for the rest,

they were hardened.

Verse 8 continues

(Verse 8)

as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day."

they have indeed seen and heard the gospel of God,

yet they have not clearly or truly seen and heard,

because “*God gave them a spirity of stupor.*”

God, in short, has Himself prevented all but an elect remnant in Israel

from coming to Christ and salvation.

and this is in keeping with scripture.

We read in verse 9

(Verse 9)

And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them;

This is from Psalm 69:22,23

I think the idea is that Israel has been blessed by God beyond the measure of other men,

yet all but an elect remnant, preserved by grace, in each generation have rejected him,

therefore the very things by which they have been blessed, have become for them, a snare and a trap and a stumbling block and a **retribution** (i.e. punishment) for them,

even Christ and the gospel which came also to them first and foremost,

has become for them a stone of stumbling.

The quote from David continues in Verse 10:

(Verse 10)

let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever."

There is some debate among the translators, as to whether this passage should read,

“bend their backs **forever**” as in the ESV

or “bend their backs **continually**”

In any case the words of David are ominous, and terrible, and frightening.

We understand that Israel as a nation has permanently failed to obtain the Kingdom of God through their own ---- religious ----efforts, and that the Church will fare no better in this.

We understand, indeed, that all who would enter the Kingdom of God must finally accept Jesus as their King and only Savior, and this is precisely what most of Israel refuses to do.

We understand that some in Israel, including some in each generation which may be hidden from human eyes, are guided into the Kingdom of Christ by the grace and mercy of God.

But what of the rest? Is most of Israel simply lost? Forever? and if so, Why? And what does this imply for the gentiles?

It is to questions such as these which Paul turns next.

And which we shall read next week God willing.

Meanwhile let's pray.

Closing Prayer

Lord God your mysteries are utterly deep and beyond our ability to penetrate unaided.

We thank you that you are a God who speaks, and who comes bringing light, and salvation.

We ask that you help us to know the boundaries of our proper knowledge.

To help us be content with what you have lovingly revealed in your word,

and to trust to you the mysteries which remain outside of your word.

We call on the name of Jesus, whose name alone can save,

and we ask for salvation for ourselves,

and for all whom you may call, O Lord.

We ask that you would continue to teach us

and to use us to further the work of your kingdom.

Please bless us with very many opportunities to honor you and to serve one another.

In Jesus Name we pray.

Amen