



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

God's Irrevocable Grace

April 26, 2020

Romans 11:1-10

Clint Pressley

11 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."*

(Pastor prays)

A crisis of faith is a devastating thing. It's like an anxiety attack except it's in your soul and it can leave you feeling unanchored and free-falling. At the very root of it is the question, "Can you trust God to be who you always believed He was? Can you trust what you know of God and is what you know of God actually true?" That is kind of where we find the Apostle Paul in Chapter 11 of Romans. Let's briefly recap and see how we got here.

Chapter 8 is the great chapter of wonderful promises, our favorite being 8:28. *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

And then Chapter 9 introduces us to God's sovereign grace, and Chapter 10 shows us our responsibility to respond in faith.

And, caught in the middle of these two mountains of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, down in the valley is Israel, God's chosen people. And in the context, lots of people are coming to Christ, but very few of them are Jews. God's eternal plan is in Jesus, His life, death on the cross and resurrection. And furthermore, Jesus is Jewish, from God's chosen people. And if that's God's plan, why aren't God's people responding?

Even the Book of Romans, written to Gentiles, Paul himself, the Apostle to Gentiles, seems inconsistent. If God is good and the Jews are His people, why aren't they being saved? And here in Chapters 9-11, it's like Paul's wonderful mind is being opened to us and we can watch him in real time – working it out!!

He's like many of us. We know the truth, we believe the Bible, but we often ask what Paul is asking in verse 1: Can God be trusted? Has He done all that He promised to do for His people and, if so, why aren't there more of God's chosen people Israel being saved?

You see it in the question in verse 1. Has God rejected His people? And he immediately answers with the strongest NO he can muster: "By no means!" And Paul spends the rest of this passage explaining to us how we can know what's the proof that God's promises are true and you can trust Him.

I want you to see and feel that today. I want you to be confident in your faith, not because your faith is strong but because God is good, loving, gracious and kind, and He is going to see us through. I want you to see...

God Has a Plan For His People and the Power to Bring it About

How do we know we can trust Him? Let's start personally.

Remember what he's done for you

Let me show you what I mean. Do you see what Paul does with the question in Verse 1? "Has God rejected His people? By no means...you know why? I myself am one of those chosen people." Now watch Paul declare his Jewishness. He does it in three statements: I am an

Israelite; I am a descendant of Abraham and I am a member of the tribe of Benjamin. Push that a little further. His name was Saul, named after the first Jewish King in the history of God's people! Paul says, you ask has God rejected His people. And my answer is, of course not! I know because I am Exhibit A, a picture of God fulfilling His promise.

But let's keep pushing on Paul's testimony. That's what this is right here. And let me just say, you should never underestimate the importance of a clear personal testimony. Paul - not only was he all the things listed in verse 1, but he was also a hater of Jesus. He was a persecutor of the church and a killer with blood on his hands and hate in his heart.

And the testimony is that God saved Saul; the crucified, resurrected Jesus changed him. The finished work of Jesus on the cross was applied to his life by faith and his sins were forgiven. And he was reconciled to God. Paul was such a terrible person that, after he got saved, nobody would talk to him except Barabbas. Paul says, this is how I know that God isn't done! Look what He has done in my life! Can you? Can you say that? Has God changed you? Have you come to Christ, turning from your sin and believed that Jesus died for you? If you can trust Him with your eternal destiny, then you can trust Him with today and tomorrow and next week.

I've shown you personally how God's not done. Now let me show you Biblically. Remember what He's done.

Read what the Bible says

Starting in Verse 2, Paul turns the attention from himself and gives us an example from the Bible. He uses the story of Elijah. Let's read it here in verses 2-5. 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.*

Paul takes us back to 1 Kings 18-19 and the most famous prophet in Israel's history, Elijah. Elijah lived in a time of outright and widespread apostasy in Israel. Two major figures in the story are Queen Jezebel and King Ahab. In his famous sermon, *Pay Day Someday*, R. G. Lee said that King Ahab was the vilest human toad that ever squatted on the throne of Israel. And what Paul is talking about here is after the victory at Mount Carmel. Jezebel threatened Elijah with his life,

and she was mean enough to go through with it. Elijah ran and ended up in a cave, praying against Israel, lamenting that there were no more faithful people left.

But look with me at verses 4 and 5. The Lord says there is a remnant and that is important. There is always the *true* Israel inside the nation of Israel. Go to your copy of God's Word and open it and ask God to speak and nourish your heart. A personal experience isn't enough, a good story is encouraging, but the Bible is going to put steel into your backbone and great resolve into your heart.

We know we can trust Him. Remember what He has done for you personally and read what the Bible says.

Rest in God's character

I think we best see His character in some of the words that Paul uses to describe Him. Let me show you a couple of descriptions.

Eternal love for His people. God has not rejected His people that He foreknew. In that sentence, the opposite of "reject" is "foreknew." To foreknow His people is to *fore-love* His people. Isn't that what Ephesians 1:4 says? *even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.*

Eternal hatred of sin. Go down with me to verses 7-8. Verse 7 is a statement and verse 8 is a combination of verses from Deuteronomy and Isaiah. Listen to the terrible description of sin in verse 7. The elect obtained it BUT the rest were hardened. It gets worse in verse 8 as *God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear.*

Let's talk about these verses. Hardened heart. We are born with the need of a new heart. Jeremiah 17:9 says, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?* Don't follow your heart! God doesn't want your heart. He wants to give you a new heart. And without that new heart, your heart of flesh gets harder and harder with sin. You can tolerate more and more. In Romans 1 we heard that finally God gave them over.

And now we see the unusual phrase in verse 8, a "spirit of stupor." The translation is the idea of being stung so much that you just don't feel it. You become numb, like a callus. You don't feel conviction.

They had eyes that would not see, spiritual blindness to Christ. And ears that wouldn't hear... spiritual deafness also.

All of this informs how we are to pray for lost people. We pray for a new heart that is sensitive to the Gospel. We pray for eyes to see the holiness and love of God, the sinfulness of sin and the atoning work of Jesus at the cross. We pray for ears to hear the character of God, His eternal love in Jesus, His eternal hatred of sin and His eternal salvation of any sinner in Jesus at the cross.

God has a plan for His people and the power to bring it about. Remember what He has done for you. Read what the Bible says and rest in God's character.

Rely on God's grace

From beginning to end, our God is a God of grace, and that grace is found at the cross of Christ. And it's the grace Paul longed for his people to know. And this passage is packed with it and I want you to live in it.

I want you to know: God's *saving* grace. Paul lifted himself up as an example, and if God will save a man like Paul, He can and will certainly save *you*. There is grace at the cross. God's sovereign grace. Verse 2 says God "foreknew." Here is God working out His plan in the middle of utter confusion for Paul. He's depending on this good God keeping His promise. We are so thankful for foreknowing, you can trust Him.

I want you to see God's *sustaining* grace. Paul uses the example of Elijah. God sustained him, fed him and also kept a remnant for himself. God sustains His people and He does it with grace and kindness. God's preserving grace. Paul takes the example of Elijah and brings it forward to his time. Even though it looked like his people weren't being saved, God was in fact bringing people to faith in Jesus. And what He did then, He will do now.

And it's because of God's free grace in verse 6. Don't you love the clarity of verse 6? *⁶But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*

It's the very definition of salvation; not by what we do but by what Christ has done in his life, death and resurrection.

How do we know it? We know it in the four categories:

God who is the holy creator, created all of us in his image.

We get to **man**. That image in us is disfigured by sin which places a chasm between us and God. The third category is **Christ**. We are in need of a savior to bridge that chasm. Jesus Christ, who lived the perfect life as man on earth, died on the cross in the place of sinners. And the **great exchange** is the fourth category. That's where **grace** comes in. It prompts you to believe; to turn from your sin and put your faith in Christ and receive God's perfect plan for your life. God has a plan for His people and the power to bring it about.

(Pastor prays)