

## The Tree

### Chapter 11:11-35

Jeremiah 31:1-20

Jeremiah 31:21-40

Responsive Psalm 98

This morning we are going to pick back up here in chapter 11, As we talked about last week, Paul previously showing how the gospel message has now been given to the gentiles through Israel's rejection of it does not mean that God has turned his back upon Israel, no he has saved for himself a remnant. Paul makes an interesting comparison here equating Israel of his time, with that of Elijah's. Elijah's lament is that Israel has turned from God, but not only turned away but are now worshiping idols and now are actively seeking to destroy his prophets. Sort of sounds like the time of Paul, Israel has turned to the idol of genealogy, of tradition, of ritual, Seeking rest and hope in their very own nature, that is, being the physical descendants of Abraham. The law, their reliance upon their genealogy has become an idol, the very thing given to show the mercy of God through the promised Messiah, is the thing that they worship, rejecting the one whom God has sent, continuing on in the practices foretelling of the one they rejected, who is the fulfillment, and substance of those things.

Imagine being a Jew, and reading these words of Paul, you are striving to find holiness and seeking to please God in the ritual and tradition that has been passed down for generations only to hear the words equating you to bowing down to a false God and idol. It's easy to see why their response to him was a violent rejection, just as it was to Christ, and later to all those who proclaimed his name. But again, the comparison with Elijah stands, "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your alters." The physical descendants of Abraham have rejected the messenger of God, had him arrested, beaten and hung upon a cross. But not all hope is lost, for though they may have turned their back upon the one whom God has sent to reconcile the world to himself, God has not forgotten his promises, as Paul says in verse 5 here, So too, in this present time, like in the time of Elijah, God has chosen for himself a remnant by grace. The evidence of this remnant was the massive change and shift at Pentecost, 1000's of Jews came to believe, and 1000's more were added afterward, and an innumerable number has been added since.

God has not rejected Israel, nor has he turned his back upon his promises or his people, by his grace and mercy he has revealed the truth of his word through the holy spirit to a remnant. And that is what Paul is getting into in our text this morning. By Paul's writing there seems to be a real threat of some believing that God has turned his back on the nation of Israel and has now instead shown his mercy upon the Gentiles. And indeed, there is a sense in which that is true, that through the rejection of Christ the gospel has now gone out to the Gentiles. In verse 7 Paul lays out the tragic state of Israel, he says, "What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened." The tragedy of Israel, is that she has been hardened, This is the same description that was given of Pharaoh's heart as he stopped the Jews from leaving Egypt to go into the promised land. Paul in effect is saying here in the early church's pilgrimage, the one who is now playing the role of Pharaoh is unredeemed Israel, who is seeking to prevent the people of God from leaving the kingdom of darkness to follow the Davidic Messiah on his triumphant march to the promised land.

So leading into today's passage, in verses 9 and 10, Paul quotes Davids prayer which was a prayer against his own family who sought to overthrow him. "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever. " Now, to add insult to injury here, Paul brings the words of their own promised Messianic King David to witness against unbelieving Israel. Davids prayer here was for God to bring vengeance upon his enemies, which Paul equates here to being the unbelieving Jews, for just as Davids enemies were those of his own family seeking to overthrow him, so now the nation of Israel, God's people, have rejected Jesus and are seeking to eliminate all who follow him. Another application that Paul is making here quoting David is that he is showing how the gospel message of Christ is the fulfillment of the promises made to David and Abraham, and to reject Christ is to reject that covenant.

And that is the stark reality that Paul is trying to bring home, the only reconciliation, the only way one can be right with God is through the remission and forgiveness of sin through the blood of the one whom God had sent to accomplish it. A rejection of Christ, is a rejection of God's salvation. They very things that were giving foretelling of him, became a stumbling block and a part of their delusion, having their eyes blinded they were unable to see who Jesus was, so that the purpose of God might stand, that by their hand Christ died for the sins of the world, and through their rejection the gospel went out to the world. As we read out passage this morning, starting in verse 11, think about all these things that Paul has been saying for it will help us to understand what he is saying here. He has pretty much given a history lesson in faith, showing that there are many in Israel who have rejected Christ therefore have been cut off of the promises and inheritance, but there is yet a remnant, and now that this gospel message has gone out to the world, there is an innumerable amount of people all across the world who have, and are coming to believe. Lets go back to verse 7, (read Romans 11:7-36 )

Again Paul points out, that God has not, and will not turn his back on Israel. He has not left his people to find another people, though Israel has constantly left him to follow after idols and false teachers yet he remains the ever faithful husband to her and keeps his promise that there shall always be a remnant who do not bow the knee to Baal. They have not fallen beyond recovery, yet because of their rejection salvation has come to the Gentiles which would provoke in them jealousy, for how can those whom they see as being not much more then animals, inherit and enjoy the richness of God's mercy. Paul suggests here that one of the very purposes of the gentile faith is to provoke Israel to jealousy, so that she may see that Christ, is the Messiah, and that God truly is with them causing them to reassess their situation. In verse 12, Paul uses a common Jewish rhetorical line of reasoning, "But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring? " If a negative event brings a positive result, then a positive result would bring a positive result of greater magnitude. To summarize and paraphrase Paul here, he is asking the church in Rome, If Israel's sin with hits consequential loss of blessing, is the cause of the rest of the world coming into blessing, how much more blessing will there be when God graciously, out of his mercy, restores the Jews to their forfeited place in the covenant?

This great transgression, this great sin which brought riches to the world, was their rejection of Christ, and it was necessary so that the prophesy of Jeremiah might stand, in chapter 31, the Lord says to Jeremiah, "Behold, the days are coming says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days says the Lord. I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts, and I Will be their God and they shall be my people.

The old covenant given to Moses on mount Sinai was ratified by the blood of bulls, and sheep, but the New covenant in Christ, was ratified by his own blood, and all that whose sins are covered by the blood of this one and only holy lamb of God, are in this new covenant spoken about by Jeremiah, establishing an Israel of faith, a chosen people from all nations and creeds, united together as brothers and sisters of the Messiah, the Son of God, and therefore joint heirs of the inheritance, given to him by God, which is eternal life in the presence of the father. Israel's rejection of the Messiah, was not only necessary, it was part of God's plan to bring in those who were not, and to bring to shame those who are. Paul uses the example of a tree in this text, he is the trunk through whom all blessings flow, life to the branches comes by him who provides, the branches who reject the nourishment of the trunk are cut off so that new may be grafted in, so that this tree of life, grafted into Christ may flourish, and blossom declaring the glory of him who provides.

And again Paul is pointing to this unification of faith, a unity of both the Jews and the Gentiles together, in Christ. He has not turned his back on them, but rather has opened the way for the rest of the world to join into the blessings that were promised to all those who believe. The days have come, spoken of by Jeremiah, a new covenant is established by the blood of Jesus the promised seed of Abraham, the offspring of David, who has come to save the world, and make a people out of those who were not his people, and bless those who were not blessed, so that his sovereign grace and mercy may stand. Making one out of many through the common faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 16, Paul says, "for if the first fruit is holy, the lump is also holy, and if the root is holy, so to is its branches." The term firstfruits is used throughout scripture and in the new testament refers to Christ, as in 1 Corinthians ( 15:20) But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Through Christ's death and resurrection, so to shall we die, and be resurrected to be with him. This was also a practice of the Jewish harvest, to offer the first of the harvest as a sacrifice to God to indicate the the rest of the harvest also belonged to him. Paul here is referring to Israel through the promises given to Abraham, who through faith believed that God would indeed do as he had promised, provide for himself a nation, as Paul pointed out earlier in Romans, chapter 4, verse 11 and 12, "So then, Abraham is the father of all who believe, but have not been circumcised" In other words, he is the father of the faithful gentiles, who have by God's sovereign grace have come to believe. "in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father had before he himself was circumcised."

He is also the father of the believing Jew, creating with the 2, one nation unified under the blood of Christ. It would seem that Paul is using the olive tree here to give an example of this reality, In the context here it would seem that the root of this olive tree is the faith of Abraham, the first fruits of many offspring, this faith in the promised Messiah is the root of salvation, and the branches are all those who believe upon him both Jew and Gentile. Verse 17, "And if some of its branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches, but if you do boast remember that you do not support the root but the root supports you." Jeremiah also describes Israel as an olive tree, in which is prophesied that God will break down the branches, and burn the tree in chapter 11, verse 16-17 " The Lord called you a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form. But with the roar of a might storm he will set it on fire, and its branches will be broken. The Lord Almighty who has planted you, has decreed disaster for you, because the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done evil and provoked him to anger by burning incense to Baal."

If the root of the tree is indeed a picture of Abraham and his faith, Paul is saying here that even though some are the natural branches, they have rejected the root therefore will be broken off, to make a way for the new branches of a wild tree to be grafted in. Which brings with it a warning, verse 19” You will say then, Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in. Well said, because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, and full of pride, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God. On those who fell, severity, but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness. Otherwise you too shall be cut off. Paul says do not boast, or be haughty believing you are better than another now that you have been brought in, the very God who broke off the unproductive natural branches can likewise do the same with the ones grafted in.” Paul is not arguing a loss of faith, but rather a reminder to all those who believe that you would not be here if it were not for the grace and mercy of God, you have provided nothing in your salvation, you can not sustain yourself, it is a reliance upon him, his word, and even the faith that was given to you by him that you remain, it is he who grafted you into his family, it is he who holds you and there is nothing for us who believe to boast in, other than that saving grace mercy of him who saved us.

Israel was a proud people, boasting in their traditions and ordinances given by God, as we can see throughout all of scripture God brings judgment upon the proud, and salvation to the meek. David understood this in his repentance when confronted by the prophet Nathan about his affair with Bathsheba, in Psalm 51 he said, O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise. For you do not desire sacrifices, or else I would give it; you do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, these O God you will not despise.” The definition of contrite is thoroughly bruised, or broken, being broken down with grief and penitence, deeply sorrowful for sin, for it is displeasing to God. This is what God desires, a broken heart, full of grief and shame for sin, seeking repentance and forgiveness from him who can provide it. It is these whom God brings into his family, those who rely solely upon him and his grace and mercy, not being puffed up or arrogant in their own ability or wisdom, but those who rest in Christ's ability. And there is a warning here in Paul's writing, in verse 22 he says, “toward you goodness, if you continue in his goodness, otherwise you will be cut off.”

We see God doing this to Israel in the old testament, they disobey, turn their back upon God, because haughty, arrogant, prideful and God sends a foreign army to conquer and capture them leading them into exile and captivity in punishment of their rebellion. This same warning still applies today, we are Christians can become haughty, and full of pride believing ourselves something special, when in reality we are no better than the next person. It is only by the grace and mercy of God that we are grafted in, or able to remain so our attitude, and the state of which we conduct ourselves in this life should never be one of pride, but rather one of reverence of the one who has called us to this saving faith.

These last few verses of Chapter 11 start to get a bit confusing and can be an area of controversy and contention, for in it, it would appear that Paul is arguing that the entirety of the Nation of Israel, that is all Jews will at one point be saved. But in the context of what he has just said about the branches being cut off, and grafted back in, and in verse 30 he equates the Gentile and Israelite in like disobedience but now through God's mercy has been brought near, Look what he says, in verse 30, For you, the gentile believers in Rome who he is writing to, were once disobedient to God, yet now have obtained mercy through their disobedience. That is, Israel's rejection of the Messiah has brought about the gospel message to the gentiles, and through their disobedience the gospel was spread.

This was always the intended purpose of God as we have argued already this morning, But Paul goes on, verse 31, “Even so these also have now been disobedient, that is Israel and her rejection of the Messiah that God has sent, but through the mercy shown to the Gentiles they may also obtain mercy.” It would seem that God uses the jealous nature of Israel to draw them to desire the salvation given to the Gentiles as Paul stated in verse 14 was his intention, “If by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh, that is my countrymen to save some of them.” Throughout Paul's writing he uses the term Israel in both the natural state, and the spiritual state, and judging by the context of the entirety of what he is saying here it is unlikely that what he is saying is that all Jews shall be reconciled and saved, for if that were the case he would not have talked about those natural branches being cut off, He says in verse 23, If they do not continue in unbelief, God is able to graft them in again.” So again I think Paul here is talking about a remnant of Israel shall be saved, but all of his spiritual Israel in faith, which is made up of both believing Jews and Gentiles shall be saved. The key is verse 30, and 31, both the gentiles, and Jews were a disobedient people, and both have obtained mercy through God, creating from the 2, one nation of believing people.

Verse 33, Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out.” God knows exactly what he is doing, and what his people need to draw them to himself. Sometimes one may need to be cut from the trunk for a time to truly be grafted back in. God is infinitely more wise, then we can know, and it is he who has designed all of these things to perfectly work within his purpose and plan. I do not doubt that God has a purpose and plan for the natural nation of Israel, though the world seeks to again constantly eradicate itself of the Jews, God has always fulfilled his promise that there shall always be a remnant. And though, one can say, as a whole they have rejected Christ, there is always a remnant who come to believe as well. God is infinitely wiser, and more merciful then we can comprehend, and it is in that which we rest knowing that he does all things according to his will for his purpose, so that many may come to believe upon him. For the word is near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead you shall be saved, for with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation. For scripture says, Whoever believes on him will not be put to shame, for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same lord over all is rich to all who call upon him. For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

There is one God, one Messiah, and one salvation, it is not found through genealogy, or law, or traditions, or striving to be a good moral person, it is only by faith in the one whom God has sent to pour out his mercy and grace upon his people. Repent, and believe upon him, who is willing and able to forgive you of your sins and he will graft you into the tree of righteousness so that you may bear fruit for his good pleasure.