Romans 11:1-16 Sermon Manuscript

“Has God Rejected Israel?”

 Have you ever had a moment in your life when you said, “enough is enough!?” ….where you just reached your limit of tolerating someone? Perhaps it’s a “friend” who keeps on promising you that he will do something but never keeps his promises. Or perhaps it’s a relationship you are in and certain things about this significant other that drives you crazy! One of those “enough is enough” moments for me was a long time ago when I was a teenager I remember my parents were duped and scammed by some Indians posing as tech/computer support. I think it had something to do with a virus where my mom’s laptop computer got infected or something like that and she couldn’t figure out how to get rid of the virus.

 So she called some company that she found online and lo and behold, they had Indian accents. “Hello maam, how are you doing? How can I helllpp you?” Oh, yeah my computer was infected and I need help getting rid of it. Oh of course, we can help you with that. You just need to let us take over your computer and we will take care of it from here.” And so she lets them zombify her computer and they start going to town with trying to search your computer for any bank account information. And I think they technically make the situation worse by introducing more viruses to make you desperate so that they increase the chances of you doing whatever they tell you to. It’s amazing the manipulation they can do. They go through this whole elaborate scheme to get my mom’s money by making her buy a gift card and stuff like that. It was wild, it was crazy, but I’m sure my parents were like “enough is enough!”

 Well, “enough is enough” was not in God’s mind when he thought of his people Israel. When we are ready to throw in the towel to give up when it comes to certain people and relationships, God has never thrown in the towel when it comes to His chosen people, the people of Israel. And that’s what God wants you to know today through our text, that God has not rejected His people, but in fact is working in them currently so that one day they will believe in their Messiah. I want to give you 5 proofs why God has not and will not reject His people? God has not rejected His people because **1) The proof of Paul’s own life 2) The proof of Israel’s past 3) The proof of Israel’s fulfilled prophecy 4) The proof that God’s covenant with them did not depend on Israel to uphold.** God has accepted the elect from Israel and it’s only a matter of time when they will one day as God says in Zechariah 12:10, “*look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.*” The last couple of Sundays, we have looked at the state of Israel.

 Starting in chapter 9, we see that not all of Israel believe because God chooses whom He chooses to save and passes over the rest. Why? So that the vessels of mercy will know the riches of God’s glory in saving them from their sin and not judging them for all eternity. So chapter 9 gave us the divine sovereignty side of the coin of salvation. Chapter 10 brings us to the other side of that same coin of salvation and gave us the human responsibility side of salvation, in that the reason why an Israelite does not believe is not because it’s God’s fault, but because it’s their fault for not believing. They do not believe and are not saved because they are trying to establish their own righteousness rather than submitting to the righteousness of God. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not different coins in contention with each other but are two sides to the same coin. Sure, there is some theological tension created by the question “how does that work?” But I am convinced that I don’t think we will ever come to know the “how” question at least until we get to heaven.

 So chapter 10 ended last Sunday with a rather bleak and depressing note in verse 21: “*But as for Israel He says, “ALL DAY LONG HAVE I STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE*.” And the apostle Paul continues his divine argument in chapter 11 verse 1. This is the first proof that God has not rejected Israel: “*I say then, has God rejected His people? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin*.” This is the verse where I got the title for my sermon. If it is up to God’s choice to choose someone for salvation and Israel is disobedient and sinful and rejects God, then has God rejected His people?!! “May it never be!!” There it is again, that phrase, Mei Genoita! For the ninth time in the book of Romans, the most absolute way to express “no!” How can you say Paul that when all else seems to indicate that? And Paul gives his own life as an example. He says, how can you say God has rejected His people when I am living proof that He has not! Have you forgotten that I am a 100 percent blooded Israelite. Yet look at me, God saved me!

 And he goes on to the second proof that God has not rejected Israel, which is the proof of Israel’s past, the proof of Israel’s past, verses 2 and 3, “*God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life*.” God’s Word is taking us back to the example of one of the most darkest times in Israel’s history in 1 Kings 19 where there was idolatrous and murderous queen on the throne, queen Jezebel, who was so sexually wicked and perverse that she would be mentioned as a motif or a personification of sexual immorality especially in the book of Revelation. Elijah was being faithful to the Lord but it seemed like he was the only one who believed and worshipped the one true God of Israel. It seemed like there were no other fellow Israelites who believed. Because of this Elijah despaired, not eating or drinking anything, not getting any sleep because he was running away for his life from Jezebel and he became suicidal saying, “Lord just take my life!” But what was God’s response to the prophet Elijah? Verse 4 “*But what does the divine response say to him? “I have left for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal*.” Little did Elijah know that He was not alone. There were 7000 of the remnant of Israel who refused to worship Baal and worshipped and was faithful to the one true God of Scriptures. What an encouragement from God! When you feel like and it seems like there is nobody but you that is willing to stand up for the truth and is faithful to the Word of God, and it seems like the whole world is against you, know this, that you are not alone. There are people everywhere around the globe that God has saved as His remnant that refuses to bow down to the god of this age.

 Verse 5 “*In this way then, at the present time, a remnant according to God’s gracious choice has also come to be. But if it is by grace, it is no longer or works, otherwise grace is no longer grace*.” Almost a thousand years before the book of Romans was written, God has preserved a remnant. And as Paul was writing the book of Romans, God was also saving a remnant unto Himself. And when we think of God, and not man, who is the one who preserves a remnant, we are reminded of the wonderful nature of grace, that grace is not earned, it is given as a gift. If grace comes because of our works, then it becomes a wage, and Paul says “*grace is no longer grace*.” Grace is unmerited favor from God. 2 Timothy 1:9 beautifully says that God “*has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.*” Verses 5 and 6 is reminding us of the doctrine of predestination or election, where from start to finish God grants faith to the believer to believe and fulfills that faith to the end in glorification. There is no room for boasting, because God has done it all for us. But we have to realize that God is not directly responsible for creating unbelief and sin to reject Him in the same way that He creates faith and righteousness in the believer’s heart.

 But starting in verse 7 balances that by reminding us of the doctrine of reprobation, the doctrine of the sinner’s condemnation. And so we come to the third proof that God has not rejected Israel, the proof that Israel fulfilled their prophecies of unbelief and failure. Verses 7 through 10, “*What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but the chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; just as it is written, God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, down to this very day. And David says, “Let their table become a snare and a trap, and a stumbling block and a retribution to them. Let their eyes be darkened to see not, and bend their backs forever*.” Those whom God showed saving grace to were those chosen to obtain it, but the rest who were not chosen did not obtain it. God is not directly responsible for sin and unbelief. He is not the one who creates unbelief in the sinner’s heart in order to condemn them.

 However, what He does do is harden sinners in response to their own hardness against Him. That’s what He did to Pharaoh, he hardened Pharaoh’s heart because Pharaoh hardened his own heart against God! I know it seems like God is directly responsible for a sinner’s unbelief when you see passages like Isaiah where it says “God gave them a spirit of stupor,” but we have to realize that Scripture does not contradict Scripture. And when it says, “God gave them a spirit of stupor” that does not conflict with James 1 where it says that “God cannot be tempted by evil and Himself does not tempt anyone with evil.” The main point we need to see here is that because the Jews insisted on their own righteousness and refused to submit to God’s righteousness, God in a sense gave them over to their sin and works righteousness and as a result they are hardened in it. It’s like fat of animals in cooking, as soon as you let off the heat, the oily liquid eventually solidifies and hardens itself. God is not the one directly causing the hardening of the liquid form of fat. All He is doing is “letting go” of his grace so to speak and the liquid naturally hardens when left to itself.

 A person’s table in those days was thought of as a place of safety, feasting and sustenance. The Jews thought they were secure and happy in their works-based righteousness and legalistic zeal before God. That was their table. But little did they realize that that table actually became a snare and a trap for them. As Paul said back in Romans 7:10 He found out that “*the very commandment, which was to lead to life, was found to lead to death for me.*” The very place of security for the Jews is the very thing that will condemn them on the day of judgment. They thought they were seeing the light through establishing their own righteousness, but actually they were being blinded to stumble about in darkness. What do you do when you can’t see and you’re trying to move and walk? You tend to bend your back and hunch over to try to see what’s ahead so you don’t trip on anything. Verse 11, “*I say then, did they stumble so as to fall? May it never be! (the 10th time!) But by their transgression salvation ahs come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous*.” Now God could have made them stumble so that they will be condemned, but He didn’t! Not for the Jews! Their stumbling is temporary, it’s not permanent or irreversible. Rather, they stumbled so that the Gentiles would be saved, causing Israel to become jealous of the salvation that they thought they had!

 That’s how deep and rich God’s mercy and grace is. You would expect God to say that because Israel failed salvation did not come to the Gentiles. Rather, salvation came to the Gentiles despite Israel failing, even though that was their mission and job! So, verse 12 “*if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fullness be*!” God created Israel to be a nation that would rule and reign over other nations if they obeyed Him. If they disobeyed Him, they would be cursed and instead the other nations would rule and reign over Israel. But in fact, the mind boggling truth that this text is saying is that God designed Israel to in fact fail to obey Him so that the other nations would be blessed by their failure! So, if something very good came out of Israel’s worst failure, how much more blessing will Israel give to the world when they themselves actually succeed!

 Verses 13 and 14 “*But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them*.” The apostle Paul recognizes that Jesus Christ commissioned Him to be an apostle to the Gentiles not because Jesus gave up on the Jews, but because He loved the Jewish people and was trying to make them jealous and yearn for salvation through Paul focusing on the Gentiles. And so we come to the fourth proof that God has not rejected Israel, which is that God’s covenant did not depend on Israel to uphold. Verses 15 and 16 “*For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? And if the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too*.” What God is going to do with the Jews in the future will be like bringing someone back to life from the dead. Spiritually they are dead, but they will one day spiritually come alive to trust in Jesus Christ. Why? Because it is not based on them to uphold the covenant, but based entirely on God’s end.

 The nature of God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was that it was unilateral, not bilateral. The upholding of the covenant did not have anything to do with Israel, but had everything to do with God upholding it. It was not dependent like all other covenants are, on both parties to uphold. That’s why the covenant was called a unilateral covenant, a one-sided covenant. And way way way back in Genesis 12 when God formed the covenant with Abraham and confirmed it with Isaac and Jacob to bless the nation of Israel, to give them rest and peace and prosperity in the land, He set the entire nation of Israel apart as holy unto Himself. And if the first piece of dough is holy which refers to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then the lump is also holy, the rest of Israel is holy, set apart. They aren’t holy because they’ve earned it or deserve it, but because God gave that special status to them and chose them for that. Just like how the root of a tree determines the nature of its branches, so how God formed the covenant with Abraham determined the outcome of His people.

 Israel has been oppressed and attacked by so many nations because of their unbelief. BY the Romans, Babylonians, Assyrians, Philistines, and Amorites, Amalekites, and every “ite and kite” you can imagine. Israel today is being attacked and hated by so many countries seeking Israel’s total annihilation, not much different from the past. It didn’t look good for Israel back then, and it doesn’t look promising for Israel right now with the whole Hamas-Israel war. But one day Israel will be given peace from her enemies and will one day on the Lord for salvation when their Messiah returns once again to judge the wicked, sit on David’s throne and establish His earthly 1000 year millennial kingdom. So keep on praying for the peace of Israel so that they would find not only peace from her enemies, but more importantly peace in the Messiah and find rest from their sins.

 If not even the worst sins and failures of Israel can cause her to be rejected and cast away by God forever, but in fact Israel failures brought you as a Gentile, blessings from heaven, the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation back to God, then that should give you great hope… Because that means that no matter how sinful and wicked of a life you have lived, God is ready to ready to forgive you all of your sins and grant you grace instead of judgment. Israel received the most light and revelation of who God is and what He requires of humanity. They were expected to abide by a standard. Yet, they failed. So their punishment and judgment should be much harsher than someone who has not been revealed those things by God and who was not expected to follow those standards. You would expect that Israel would be the most hopeless nation and the most deserving of wrath because they failed to be the light God had told them to be. Yet, God has not rejected even Israel. So how much more will He accept you as a Gentile! And if even God purposed the most evil act in history, the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to be the source of our eternal good, the source of your salvation, how much more will He forgive you of any sin against Him?

 Isaiah 55:6-9 says, “*Seek Yahweh while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to Yahweh, And He will have compassion on him and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares Yahweh. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts*.” What Israel did to God was like what Gomer did to her husband Hosea in continually having adultery with other men. Yet, God commanded Hosea to not divorce her but to be continually faithful to her and wooing her back to Him so that He could show to Israel that that is what God is like to an unfaithful people. And you ask how can anyone stay in a marriage like that and not give up and say “enough is enough”? How can anyone continue to tolerate and even forgive someone like Gomer who is not faithful to her husband? If you’re thinking like that, God says to you, “*My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thought than your thoughts*” for I am the one who abundantly pardons. God’s kindness and forgiveness is infinitely higher than ours. Why wouldn’t you desire His forgiveness? Let’s pray