Romans 11:17-36 Sermon Manuscript

“So That He May Show Mercy To All”

 Had you ever wondered what would be a great one word response to someone asking for “proof” that the Bible is actually the Word of God? Well there once lived in Prussia a king called Frederick the Great. Frederick the Great liked to have conversations with his chaplain about the Bible’s authority and inspiration. He was skeptical of the Bible’s divine origin and one day asked his chaplain if there was any “proofs” or “evidence” that the Bible was truly what it claimed to be, the very inspired word of God. And you know what the chaplain said to King Frederick? The chaplain gave a one-word response. “Israel.” When he said Israel, Frederick responded in silence. And that is certainly one way to give proof that the Bible is the inspired breathed word of God that if you look at the nation of Israel, there is no other explanation for Israel’s continued existence other than that God was preserving the nation for His future purposes. By the world’s standards and expectations, Israel should not be existing, there should be no Jews left in existence after all that they went through where nation after nation tried to exterminate them. Yet they live to this very day.

 But Israel’s exists as a nation today not only to offer excellent proof for the fact that the Bible is indeed the very word of God. Israel exists today to show a profound reality about our salvation. There is something profound between what is going on with Israel, the Gentiles, and our salvation that is deeper than we realize. And God is going to reveal that to us today in our text in Romans 11:17-36. And here is that profound reality in a nutshell: Israel became disobedient and salvation came to the Gentiles so that Israel would not boast that they were better than anyone else. But the Gentiles also cannot boast that they are better than the Jews because 1) their faith did not originate with them, but originated with God as a gift to them 2) The Jews were the first to receive salvation and without them, they wouldn’t experience the blessing of salvation in the first place. So the end result is that neither Jew nor Gentile can boast about believing in Christ because God designed salvation so that neither could boast about being better than the other but that they would all boast in God’s mercy to save them alone.

 We are starting in verse 17 and the only reason why I stopped at verse 16 last time was because of time. Last time in Romans 11:1-16 we looked at the question “Has God rejected His people Israel?” And the apostle Paul says “by no means” offering us 4 proofs for why God has not rejected Israel. The first is the proof of Paul’s own life. Paul himself is a fully Jewish man, and the fact that He is now a follower of Christ is proof that God has not abandoned His people and banned them from salvation in Christ. We saw that the second proof that God has not abandoned His people was because of Israel’s past. God took us back to 1 Kings 19 where Elijah thought he was all alone in worshipping and being faithful to the one true God, but found out that God has preserved a believing remnant, 7000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Just as he preserved a remnant of faithful Jews who believed in God, so He is currently preserving a remnant as well. We saw that the third proof that God has not abandoned His people was the proof of Israel’s fulfilled prophecy. Isaiah and other prophets prophesied hundreds of years prior to the coming of Christ that Israel would be blind and deaf to the Messiah. He predicted Israel’s unbelief. And it came true that as a whole the nation of Israel refused to believe in the Messiah. The reason why that is a proof is because it shows us Israel’s unbelief was not something that God did not expect or that it caught him by surprise as if God said, “Oh no, I didn’t expect my people to refuse my Son!” But rather, before the foundations of the world were laid, God purposely, intentionally designed salvation to the work it worked out where Israel would fail to believe and salvation would come to the Gentiles. And finally we looked at the proof that God’s covenant with Israel did not depend on Israel to uphold but on God alone. When God formed the Abrahamic covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 to provide him and his offspring a land, seed, and blessing, God alone walked through the split pieces of the sacrificed animals. Normally in those days, covenants or treaties would be established with both parties walking through the split animals symbolizing that if either of them failed to keep their end of the covenant or deal, they would be end up dead like the sacrificed animals. But Abraham did not walk through the animals but God alone, showing that God alone swore by His own self that He would accomplish it. And so we know and can trust that God alone will accomplish and will fulfill His promises to Abraham and to his descendants to provide them a land, seed, and blessing one day through the reign of the Anointed One, Jesus Christ.

 And so that’s where we are currently in chapter 11. As I looked at it more closely, I probably should have ended our last sermon on Romans with verse 15 instead of verse 16, because verse 16 starts a different connected thought. *And if the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became a partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast against them, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you*.” Paul has talked quite negatively about Israel and their rejection of the Messiah, but it’s the truth and the reality of the nation. But now after having fired the cannon of humility to the Jews, Paul now points the cannon of humility to the Gentiles, to us. The temptation for us Gentiles reading this would be to think that God chose us over the Jews because we were smart enough and had more common sense than the Jews to believe in the Messiah than not to believe in Him. And if you think that way, the apostle Paul says to you, “*do not boast against the branches*.” “*Do not boast against the branches*.”

 Keeping up with the tree analogy, Paul says that we Gentiles are like a wild olive that God grafted into the rich root of the olive tree that is Israel. Grafting was a known practice in those days and these olive trees would grow increasingly fruitless after living for hundreds of years. Over time, there were branches that became dead and needed to be pruned and in its place a wild olive branch would be grafted in to bear new fruit. And that’s what happened to Israel. They were supposed to be this rich olive tree bearing this holy fruit that would draw the nations to Yahweh to worship Him. But they became fruitless when they ran after other gods and disobeyed God. Their branches became worthless and fruitless. The Jews failed to believe in Jesus Christ the Lord. And so, God grafts the Gentiles into the blessing of the rich olive tree to receive the life giving nourishment of the Messiah. But we must not get a big head as if we were special because it is not we support the root that is Israel, but the root supports us. Jesus said to the woman at the well in John 4 that salvation is of the Jews, meaning that salvation comes from the Jews. It didn’t come from the Gentiles originally, it came from the Jews because they were His special chosen people who were tasked to bring salvation to the world.

 But here’s an objection that God anticipates in verse 19: “*You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”* Okay, I can see that salvation finds its source from Israel, but didn’t you say or at least imply that God designed salvation so that the unbelief of the Jews would lead to the belief and salvation of us Gentiles? Doesn’t make us special and a priority for God over the Jews?! And to that God says verse 20 *Quite right! They were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be haughty, but fear*.” Yes, you’re right they were branches of Israel were broken off for their unbelief, but are you any different? May I remind you that you stand by your faith? Why is that significant that Paul makes an effort to remind us that we stand by our faith? Because faith is what….? Is it something that we come up with? Does faith originate with us? Or is faith a gift as the Bible says it is. And so if faith is a gift, that means we have contributed nothing to our salvation. There is nothing that we have done to earn salvation, which means we are saved by mercy alone, just like how God WILL show mercy to a Jew who initially rejected Jesus but then comes to later believe in Him. We don’t deserve God’s infinite mercy, and yet He showed us mercy. So we need to fear Him, we need to approach Him trembling under the weight of so great a love that He has shown to us who are unworthy sinners. It is that this type of fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom. It is this type of fear that makes you depart from evil. It is a type of fear that does not let you presume upon His grace because you love Jesus so much that you fear not condemnation, but the loss of intimacy with Jesus when you put sin between you and Jesus Christ.

 And to add to the power of the cannon shot, the Word of God says in verse 21 “*for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either*.” The point of this verse is if God did not give the nation of Israel a special exception from their unbelief, then He will CERTAINLY not give us Gentiles a special exception for not believing in His one and only Son either. So what should be our proper response to the truths we have just seen in these verses. Verse 22 is the application of how we should respond. Verse 22 “*Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off*.” God is not a God to be trifled with. His grace is not to be presumed upon and taken advantage of as a license to sin. God has shown His severity through His wrath in the past to Israel where He will by no means clear the guilty. 1 Corinthians 10:7-12 speaks about God’s severity. “*Do not be idolaters, as some of them were. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.” Nor let us act in sexual immorality, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have arrived. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall*.”

 “Let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.” As soon as we think we have attained Christian maturity or sanctification or that we are above certain sins, that is when our flesh, the world, and the devil strikes and takes us by surprise. But for us we have not fallen under God’s severity. Rather we have been shown kindness granted that we continue in His kindness…because if we don’t we also will be cut off. Wait a minute! Is Paul suggesting here someone who has been justified and declared righteous before God can lose their salvation? If you believe that salvation is ultimately dependent on your choice and not on God’s choice, then yes. If you chose to be saved, then you can chose to be unsaved as well. But we have seen over and over again that that’s not what Scripture teaches does it? Then what does he mean by this? This is what he means. If you truly have tasted the kindness and goodness of God in salvation, then you will be obedient to continue in that kindness of God, showing gratefulness to God for His mercy and living as a child of mercy. But I say to all of you that if you are not living as one who has been transformed by God’s kindness, if your life does not reflect that you love Him, if your life consists of offering only lip service to Jesus and an outward appearance of being a Christian, then beware…that severity that fell on the unbelieving Israelites will fall on you if not today, then on that final day when He will come again and judge all according to His righteousness.

 Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-23 that “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, in Your name did we not prophesy, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness*.’” And just know Bethel that I’m not using Matthew 7 to create doubt about your salvation. Quoting texts like Matthew 7 is always tricky business and is dangerous for a preacher because it could sow seeds of doubt in true believers if not delivered properly. Now this verse is sobering and should terrify you for what it means for others, but it shouldn’t terrify you personally about your own salvation, because Romans 8:1 says, “*there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*.” However, if these verses from Matthew 7 makes you terrified about your salvation, and makes you concerned and question whether you are truly secure in Christ, then maybe that is God telling you through His Word to examine yourself to see if you are in the faith.

 Verse 23, “*And they also (the Jews), if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree (that is Israel), how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own live tree*?” To continue in the kindness of God means to not continue in unbelief, and if Israel will call on Jesus’ name, He will save them and graft them back into the remnant of believing Jews. But Paul why are you even talking about branches, trees, Israel, and Gentiles? What’s your point? The point is this. Verse 25 “*For I do not want you to be uninformed of this mystery-so that you will not be wise in your own estimation – that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*;…” Don’t think for a moment Gentiles that you have it all figured out. Don’t be wise in your own estimation. Israel’s hardening is not permanent…it is temporary until the church age, the times of the Gentiles has been fulfilled and God has accomplished what He wanted to do with the Gentiles. And when that “fullness of the Gentiles” has come in, then verse 26 will happen “*and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins*.” Notice all the future verbs that God promises to do. God WILL save all Israel. Jesus WILL come from Zion. God WILL remove ungodliness from Jacob. And God’s COVENANT (implied) WILL take away their sins. But that has not happened to Israel yet. So what are we to make of these promises?

 Well verse 28 tells us “*From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable*.” Again Paul peels back the divine curtain of God’s sovereignty to show us His perspective in that from our perspective, the Jews seem to be enemies of the gospel, but from God’s perspectives, they aren’t enemies, but beloved because of God’s original covenant with Israel’s patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Once God has promised something, He will never take it away, it can never be broken and furthermore if God has decided to show mercy and grace to someone, that grace and that mercy can never be rejected or thwarted, and that is a good thing. That is good news…that is good news for all of us because no sin is too powerful or horrible to overcome the triumph of God’s grace. You can try all you want to run away from God’s grace. If you are listed in His book of predestined souls to be saved, there is nothing you can do to reject that. One author said, that God pursues us like a hounds of heaven, there is no escaping the hounds of heaven.

 Verses 30-32, “*For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all*.” God designed salvation history to where the Jews would disobey God so that God would show mercy to the Gentiles to keep the Jews from boasting in themselves that they were the special people of God. But God is preventing the Gentiles from boasting in themselves that God saw something special in the Gentiles to save them over the Jews because God is one day going to save all of Israel. The Jews did not believe which led to the Gentiles believing, but through the Gentiles believing the Jews will believe. The end result all have disbelieved and have been shown to be disobedient so that God’s mercy would be magnified as He shows the same mercy to all! Who would have thought of this? Who has the wisdom and the foresight and the knowledge to plan this whole grand plan of salvation to where we humans are shown mercy and yet God’s mercy would be most magnified and maximized to His glory?! Only God can!!!

 And that’s why Paul bursts out into doxology in verse 33 thru 36. “*Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways*!” The word unfathomable is a word that literally means untrackable. It is a word that was used of animal whose footprints could not be tracked by a hunter. Oh to think that we puny humans would ever dare question God’s judgment and justice and think that we have the right to tell God how to run His world! It’s insanity to do that. Why is God’s judgments “unsearchable” and his ways “unfathomable?” Because verse 34 “*For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?” Or who has first given to Him that it might be repaid to him*?” Has God ever had a mental breakdown and was unsure of Himself and had to see a biblical counselor? Has there been anyone in history that was God’s spiritual adviser that when God thought of a plan, that spiritual adviser said to God…well now God I don’t think that will be quite the best way to go about things. Let me propose a different way. Or is God so needy and so lacking that he begs us to believe in Him so that He would be fulfilled and satisfied? Are we doing God a favor by believing in Him? Uhhh…okay God let me do you a favor and believe in you. Are you happy now that I believed?! No, no, no. “Let God be found true and every man found to be a liar.”

 Verse 36 “*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen*.” I am the alpha and the omega, I am the first and the last. All things start with God, all things happen because of God, and all things exist and happen in the universe for the glory of God. There is not a nano second of time that goes by without God’s permission. There is not a subatomic particle that explodes and wanders through space that is outside the sovereign control of God. Everything that happens every millisecond in the universe is being sustained, allowed, and controlled by and for God’s glory. The reason you are not tearing apart into a million subatomic particles. The reason you are able to see, hear, taste, smell and experience life is all because Jesus Christ is sustaining and holding the universe together in perfect conformity and uniformity because He is a kind God. And the reason why we are not in hell at this moment is because God is merciful because He has silenced all in their disobedience so that may show mercy to all who call on His name. We are just a stroke from the paintbrush of redemptive history on the canvas of God’s glory. All of creation exists to magnify God’s glory, and you exist to magnify God’s glory. You are either going to magnify the glory of God’s justice in Him giving you hell for refusing to believe in His one and only Son Jesus Christ. Or you are going to magnify the glory of God’s mercy in Him giving you heaven for trusting and obeying Jesus Christ your Lord and maker. So which way are you going to glorify God? Let’s pray

Benediction:

Romans 11:36

**“***For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”*