

“ISRAEL’S LOSS IS GENTILES’ GAIN.”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 11:11-24

Introduction.

It is interesting to consider God has ordained that we are thinking about Romans 11 and the relationship between Jews and Christians at this time in our history, at a time when there is a rise in anti-Semitism. Keep that thought in the back of your mind as we work through our text.

I am sure you are aware Paul is being repetitiously repetitive in chapters 9-11. Why do you think Paul is saying these things over and over again? The first answer is the Holy Spirit inspired him to write these things over and over again. OK, so why did the Spirit do that?

In chapter 11 of Romans Paul is wrestling with two great issues in the early church that were a big deal and a hard truth to grasp.

The scandal of the Jews absence from the church, the scandal of the Jews rejection of the Gospel, and God’s rejection of God’s people after two thousand years.

And the scandal of the presence of the Gentiles in the church. The cutting off of the Jews and the grafting in of the Gentiles.

The great tension in the early church was racism. The Church was divided, between Jews and Gentiles. The first and biggest controversy facing the early church after Pentecost was what to do with the Gentiles. The first big synod meeting of the early church was about what to do with Gentile converts to Christianity. The early church had an immigration problem and it was racial.

The Jews hated Gentiles, they couldn’t stand them. They were filthy, dirty, smelly, unclean. They referred to them with a derogatory word, the uncircumcised. They ate unclean food, their temples were filled with sexual immorality, they sacrifice their children (sort of first century abortion). The early Jewish Christians said the only way a Gentile could become a Christian was to become circumcised and to follow Jewish laws and practices.

But as the church grew and spread, the next scandal was what to make of the absence of the Jews from the church, especially in the church in Rome. The Gentiles were worshipping a Jewish Messiah, so where were the Jews? Why weren't they coming to church? Paul has to explain this to the church in Rome. The answer has two parts.

First, the Jews rejected Jesus. They denied that Jesus was the Messiah and they killed Him.

One of the scariest verses in the Bible is when the Jews were demanding Pilate crucify Jesus, even though Pilate found Him innocent. So Pilate called for a basin of water and

Matthew 27:24-25 He took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." 25 And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"

His blood be on us and on our children! They called down damnation on themselves and their children, on future generations. Do we not tremble over those words? They killed the Son of God, a shocking, earth shattering sin.

John 1:11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

The Jews stumbled over the stumbling stone of Christ. They did not submit to Him and instead rejected Him. We saw this over and over again in the book of Acts, every time Paul went to the Jewish synagogues to preach the Gospel, he was rejected and thrown out and run out of town.

They would not accept their Messiah, they would not accept the righteousness that comes by faith. They wanted their own righteousness, keeping their laws, Sabbath, circumcision, holy days to make them acceptable to God. They said we don't need Jesus, we have Abraham as our father. Jesus said, no you don't have Abraham, your father is the devil, and they went crazy.

Hanging on to the filthy rags of their own righteousness they turned away from the free offer of the righteousness of Christ. So God turned to the filthy rags of the Gentiles and raised up from among the Jews an apostle to the Gentiles to offer the Gospel to them.

11:11-15

God's purpose in doing this is twofold, to save the world and to make the Jews jealous that they might be saved. The Jews had fallen, but their fall was not beyond recovery. They have a future and a hope, and God will use the Gentiles to bring it about.

12 If their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

It is a miracle of grace and mercy when outsiders, sinful pagans receive mercy and grace. It is even more of a miracle when hardened religious insiders become open to receiving that same grace. It will be like they died, and then, miracle of miracles, they were raised from the dead.

Think of it this way. If the temporary and partial exclusion of the Jews means the riches of God's grace and kindness to the rest of the world, then how much more should their final full inclusion be seen as a blessing to the world, to those who have received so much from them.

If we have received our salvation from them, would we not rejoice when they receive salvation back from us?

God rejected the Jews for their rejection of His Son. But God being God, takes even the worst sins and uses them for His glory, and turns them for His redemptive purposes. Through their trespass, through their sin, God brought salvation to the Gentiles. And this was not a failure, or a hiccup in God's plans, this was not plan B.

It was God's redemptive purpose to use the seed of Abraham to be a blessing to all the nations, to all the families of the earth.

Paul says God is out to make the Jews jealous. He makes a big deal of his being an apostle to the Gentiles in order to make his fellow Jews jealous so they might turn back to the Messiah that is written about in their Bible.

Paul wants the Jews to see the Gentiles getting the inheritance of Abraham and make them jealous so they would respond to the Gospel of Jesus.

Who thought of using jealousy as a tool for *evangelism*? Who thought of living our lives in such a way that we became salt and light in a way that attracts others to the salt and light?

Matthew 5:16 Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

I Peter 2:12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

One of the effects of salt is to make us thirsty. May our lives make others thirsty for Jesus.

Think about what this is saying about grace and the Gospel. There is something deeply, intrinsically, foundationally attractive about grace and mercy, and about people who display grace and mercy in their lives, people whose words and actions are shaped by the transforming influence of the Gospel in their lives.

So much so that people notice and say, “I want what they have.”

Paul hopes and prays when his fellow Jews see the beauty of grace among the Gentiles they will want it. Grace is never meant to be purely for our own sake, it is always meant to spill over and overflow to those around us.

11:16-24

The Jews who did not believe in the Messiah were broken off from the olive tree, the tree of the covenant. And wild olive branches were grafted into the covenant root. The Gentiles are the new Israel, the church.

Ephesians 2:11-13 Remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, ... 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

You were once wild fruitless olive branches, no better than weeds, but now you share the life-giving, nourishing, fruitful olive root, with all the blessings and riches Christ offers. Gentiles are now the offspring of Abraham. If you are Christian, you are an heir of Abraham.

Now why does Paul warn the Gentiles about pride and arrogance and boasting? What is going on here? Paul knows the human heart.

There are racial tensions in the church, there have always been and there still are. All of us have a built-in tendency to feel superior or better than certain others. We all face the constant temptation to make contrasts and comparison between us and others.

Paul knows of what he speaks personally, he was once a proud, boasting Jew, not just superior to those outside, but superior to his fellow Jews.

If you had been trashed talked against most of your life and all of a sudden the tables were turned and now you were on the winning team, how might you be tempted to talk back to those who had put you down for so long.

“Look what God did, He cut off the Jews so that we could be grafted in. Doesn’t this make us better, more liked, more loved?”

Paul knew the Gentiles were starting to get smug and feel like they were something special. God had rejected those mean, nasty Jews in the synagogue across the street, God had given them their very own special apostle.

No, how can the branches boast as if they were more important than the root. Remember it is all by grace and through faith. Boasting and pride says you think it is about you, about your efforts and works. Pride undermines grace and forgets they are grafted in by mercy, not merit.

We are to fear being proud or presumptuous, forgetting that we stand by faith alone. You came in with nothing, empty hands, submitting to Christ in faith.

Don’t boast and brag about the Jews being cut off and you being grafted in. You are not the root, and you don’t bear the root, rather the root bears you. The Jews were cut off because of unbelief and the only reason you are grafted in is because of faith.

Remember your own roots, what you once were. You would be nothing and have nothing if it wasn’t for the promises and the covenant and the Christ who has come and fulfilled the promises and the covenant.

Don’t get all puff up like you are superior, better, have something over them. Rather you should have an appropriate level of fear. Boasting and bragging that they were the children of Abraham got the Jews cut off, and boasting and bragging could just as easily get the Gentiles cut off.

What was it that got the Jews removed? Trusting in their own righteousness, taking their salvation for granted; giving lip-service to God, going through religious motions without their hearts really belonging to him. There is that heart issue again.

Is that same thing possible for the Gentiles? Could the Gentiles say, “We have Calvin as our father, we are good. We have TULIP and the Solas. We have our Christian schools, our Christian country.” Gentiles can become cultural Christians but not spiritual Christians like the ethnic Jews were not spiritual Jews.

Their lips praise God, but their hearts are far from Him. They go to church but they don’t worship. Church is optional, if they aren’t busy. They don’t love God from a pure heart, with their whole heart, they don’t desire to obey Him. Is there an area of disobedience in your life right now, something you know God wants you to do but you aren’t doing it?

Yes, Gentiles can become like the branches God removed from Israel? God cut them off and He can cut them off. There but for the grace of God, go I.

Implications and application.

One clear take away from this text is that there must be no anti-Semitism in the church or in our hearts. We owe everything we have to them, the prophets, the apostles, the promises, the covenant, our Messiah. We are only branches, they gave us our roots. Let there be no anti-Semitism among us.

Another application is to ask where are we arrogant? Who do we look down on? Who do we feel better than? What do we boast and brag about? Out of the heart the mouth speaks.

Union and management
Teachers and principals
Employees and bosses
Dutch and everyone else
Reformed and everyone else
Singles and marrieds
Males and females
Environmentalists and rest
Lynden and Lynden Christian
Lynden and Bellingham
East side of Lynden and west side of Lynden
Whatcom county vs. King/Pierce country
UW and WSU, Huskies and Cougars

Does it spill over into our church? Balcony and downstairs? Are we arrogant, conceited? Is Christ’s church divided? Do we withhold forgiveness? Do we refuse to love, to

extend grace? How can one branch be arrogant toward another branch? We have both been grafted in through no merit of our own.

We all have heart issues, are we willing to examine our own hearts and test and see if there is any sinful, unloving way in us. May Christ not be divided in our fellowship. May we make allowances for each other, may we think more highly of others than ourselves. May we be welcoming to one another.

May we always be humbled by the grace of God that freely chose to graft us into Christ's church. Faith is the only thing that connects us to the tree of salvation. May we never say or do anything that puts us in danger of being cut off.

To God alone be all the glory, praise and honor. For from Him, through Him and to Him are all things.