What Is God Doing Today? Mind-Blowing Mercy
Series: Righteousness Revealed
Romans 11:1-36
Chadron Bible Church

Well this week my kids decided to dump another puzzle out on the coffee table, and, feeling myself drawn to spend time with them, I sat down to help. And immediately when I sat down, what do you think I did? I asked, Where's the box? Because the box gives you the big picture. Unless you see the bigger picture, it's just a bunch of unconnected details that you don't really know how to put together. It's pretty hard to stay focused or make progress in the details or even make the details the main thing.

Romans 1-11 is loaded with theological details, especially 9-11. Two weeks ago, we spent time in **chapter 9**. The primary focus was on God's **sovereignty** in relation to Israel. Simply being a descendant of Abraham doesn't automatically save you. God has just as much right to harden Israel as He does Pharaoh. The OT predicted an ingathering of Gentiles and a remnant of Israelites. If you didn't leave confused by that, you certainly did the next week when we opened **chapter 10** and talked about **human responsibility**. Israel heard the gospel. Understood the gospel. But **at the end of chapter 10, Paul said Israel rejected** it. So the question is raised again: **Has God rejected them**? Because if He has, after all the promises He has made to them, then how can we trust Him to keep His promises to us? This then leads Paul to take all the theological details discussed and give us a **sweeping overview of God's sovereign program**. Give us the bigger picture of what God is doing today. We have a lot of ground to cover.

I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 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 pleads with God against Israel? 3 "Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." 4 But what is the divine response to him? "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. 7 What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; 8 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." 9 And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, And a stumbling block and a retribution to them. 10 "Let their eyes be darkened to see not, And bend their backs forever."

God's present rejection of Israel is <u>partial</u>, not complete.

Paul

So in response to the claims or rumors going around that God had completely rejected ethnic Israel, **Paul first points to himself**. He says, "Look at me! I'm an Israelite who came to Christ after the Church had already started." We should probably add that Paul was an Israelite steeped

in self-righteousness, rejected the gospel, and Jesus pursued him and stopped him in his tracks, saving him. God simply chose him from among Israel to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

Elijah
Secondly, he points to **the example of Elijah**. The majority of Israel at the time was so spiritually backslidden under the kingship of **Ahab and his wife, Jezebel**, that true followers of Yahweh were few and far between. Worship of Baal was prevalent, and after the Mt. Carmel incident when prophets of Baal were killed, Jezebel put out a hit on his life, and he was worried that he alone was faithful in Israel. I alone am left. How does God respond to him? He says, I have kept for Myself **7,000** men who haven't worshiped Baal. So somehow, in God's sovereignty, He preserves a **remnant** of faithful Israelites.

Remnant
Verse 6 reminds us that this **remnant** is not a product of their own doing. It wasn't because they were better than the rest. It was simply the result of **God's gracious choice**. If God hadn't choice them, Romans 9 says they would've been exterminated like Sodom & Gomorrah.

G. v. L.
Verse 6 also reminds us that the systems of **grace and law** are diametrically opposed. I grew up in a religious system that taught that you could earn grace through religious works. This verse is teaching the opposite. You cannot earn it otherwise grace is no longer grace.

While God does preserve a remnant, verses 7-10 remind us that **God hardens the rest**. Paul quotes the OT Law, Prophets, and Writings to prove it, as if to say, what's happening today is nothing new. Israel has been spiritually dull and insensitive in the past as well, failing to respond to God's miracles and blessings.

Continuing on, we turn from the idea of the remnant in the present and dealt with **the future of ethnic Israel as a whole.**

God's present rejection of Israel is <u>temporary</u>, not final.

11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they?

The question implies, Have they stumbled so hard *that they, Israel, cannot get back up again*? Is this fall a *final fall*? Pardon me for being sac religious, but it's like the commercials: Have they fallen and can't get up? Will God's people continue to include *only a small number of Jewish believers*, as it now does? Paul's response is most familiar:

May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. 12 Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! 13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection is

the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 If the first piece of dough [first fruit] is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.

So basically, Paul starts to talk about how because the Jews rejected Christ, His attention turned to the Gentiles. That's an evident move in the Gospels with Jesus' ministry and in Acts with Paul's ministry. But with that turning to the Gentiles, God is also seeking to **win more Jews.** The idea is that Jews will see their promised spiritual blessings being poured out on the Gentiles and want it for themselves. So follow the sequence. He started with Israel. They turned away. He turns to the Gentiles. The Gentiles provoke them to turn back.

To **illustrate, sometimes parents will reward** one of their children for being obedient, but will withhold a reward from another one of their children who has been disobedient. The intent of that treatment is, in part, to motivate the disobedient child to become more obedient. Hey, your sibling finished their dinner, so they get to enjoy a cookie. If you want to enjoy a cookie too, you need to do the same. In theory, our enjoyment of God's blessings promised to Israel will make them desire those blessings for themselves. That's the idea. So, big principle time:

God is moving in such a way so as to bring <u>Jews</u> and <u>Gentiles</u> to salvation.

It's awesome. It's mind blowing stuff, quite honestly.

Great Inclusion
But in this portion, I think Paul start to hint at the fact the there is **a greater inclusion** coming. A time where Israel as a majority or a whole will turn back. It will move from the remnant to the whole. He talks about fulfillment and acceptance and **life from the dead**. In other words, someday the situation is going to change. Just as they've been hardened, so they will be softened as so much prophecy predicts. There will be a **spiritual renewal** and **physical resurrection**.

Two Metaphors
In verse 16, he uses **two metaphors**: the dough and the lump, the roots and the branches. Both of these give the sense that there will be a moving from a **first foundation to a finished product**. From **beginning to end.** From **lesser to greater**. From **start to finish**. It sets up the discussion that follows, that is, that the existence of a remnant of Jewish believers at the present time creates an expectation of greater blessings to come because the promises to Abraham are still at play.

And I'm going to read this section about the olive tree in such a way that it makes it clear we are talking about **people groups or nations** and not individuals. You'll probably see why.

17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by

your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. 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. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

Root
So Paul likens God's promise-plan to a cultivated olive tree. The **root**, based on other ancient Jewish writings, probably refers to the **promises to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob)**.

Jewish Tree & Branches
The tree that has grown and is nourished from that is a **Jewish tree**, and the **branches**, **naturally, are Jewish**. However, when many of the Jews did not believe, **unnatural, wild, Gentile branches** were grafted in (contrary to nature). Israelite branches cut off. Gentiles branches grafted in.

Warning Against Pride
But Gentiles are also warned that if they become **proud** against the natural branches—Israel—God is able and willing to graft them back in. I think it assumes they will be grafted in again.

People Groups, Not Individuals
The reason why I read it that way I did is because sometimes people read this and start thinking individually. Oh no, I could be cut off. That's not the point. That would be contrary to everything he's taught in Romans about eternal security. It's talking about Gentiles and Jews as separate people groups. God turning His attention back to Israel and blessing them.

Practical Effects in Mixed Churches
Gentile Christians should not delude themselves by thinking that they have, by anything merits of their own, been put in the blessing place of God. Gentiles have no reason to brag about their salvation. God turned to the Gentiles because of Israel's disobedience and our salvation is being used to save more Israelites. Think about how **practically moving** this must have been in Rome where there were mixed Jewish-Gentile churches and the majority were Gentiles who were pointing fingers at the Jews, saying, "God's done with you. You crucified the Messiah." You want to talk about shame, guilt, anger, division. Unfortunately, that's been the dominant attitude of the universal church towards the Jews throughout the centuries. But Paul puts an end to that thinking with deep theology. "Gentiles, your fathers in the faith are Jewish, your Bible is Jewish, your Messiah is Jewish. Your security is only secure if God still keeps His promises to the Jews. Don't forget that. You should be cheering them on to Christ and not becoming proud against them." But he goes on and speaks of their future acceptance to further deaden their pride.

24 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, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? 25 For I do not want you, brethren, 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; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob." 27 "This is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." 28 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; 29 for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. 32 For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.

Mystery of Regrafting

So this pride reducing **mystery**, I believe, is that of **Israel's regrafting**. Just as they were hardened, so they will be softened. The idea is that after **the fullness of the Gentiles** has come in, the partial hardening will be removed and "all Israel will be saved."

Time & Simplicity—God turns afresh to Israel

I know there are different ways to interpret some of this but for the sake of **time and simplicity**, from my understanding of the **text** and **other prophetic passages**, what it teaches is that there is an event in time coming, near Christ's return, when **God turns afresh to Israel**. Through the Great Tribulation period, Israel is winnowed by God, and all the Jews that remain (a greater majority than is being saved today) are going to cry out to Jesus whom they pierced. Jesus, their **Deliverer, who comes from Zion (Jerusalem)** will come to save them from the evils of the Anti-Christ and Gentile kingdoms, and they will physical and spiritual renewal in the New Covenant and all the blessings that come with Christ and His kingdom.

Mind-Blowing Mercy

Just as we've been shown mercy, so they will be shown mercy, and this will be the culminating event of world history. And it's going to blow everyone's minds. Everyone's jaws are going to drop as God magnifies Himself in the sight of the nations through them.

Dual Position: Enemies & Beloved

During the present era, where God is primarily working with Gentiles, they are considered **enemies** of the gospel because they ferociously try to stop the gospel from spreading. But, we must remember, God didn't choose them for their goodness. They are still **beloved** for the sake of their fathers and God doesn't break His covenant. His choice is **irrevocable**. Whether you're a son of Abraham by faith or by blood, there's a bright future ahead. So summing it up:

Romans 11 Reasons God is not done with Israel:

1. **God saved Paul, an Israelite.**
2. **God presently saves a remnant of Israelites.**
3. **God uses the Gentile salvation to save more Israelites.**
4. **God is able to graft Israelites back in.**
5. **God will honor His irrevocable promises.**

What does that mean for you and I?

We can trust God to keep His promises.

If God doesn't break His promises to Israel, He won't break His promises to us. Nothing can stop Him fulfilling His plans, and nothing will separate us from Christ. He sovereignly intervenes to make His glory and mercy known. And that's what it's all about.

Individual salvation is great. Israel's salvation is great. But they aren't the main point of human history. **The goal of human history and the reason for our existence is to glorify God for His mercy.** Paul appropriately ends this section of Romans with a doxology. Praise.

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? 35 Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

We might say Paul ends this difficult section with his hands raised.

His hands are raised in <u>intellectual surrender</u>.

His wisdom and knowledge and ways are unsearchable. Unfathomable. Who has known His mind? Paul knew a lot, but even he said, I don't know it all. And I'm fine taking that seat beside him. How does chapter 9 and 10 go together? Sovereignty and responsibility? Don't ask me. They just do. They're **not a problem to be solved, but a tension to be maintained**. At some point, we need to just stop questioning and demanding answers, and instead, believe and worship. Don't get lost in the details and forget the big picture: God's mercy.

His hands are raised in <u>wonderous praise</u>.

None of us, Israel or Gentile, deserves God's mercy. We're all Romans 1 sinners. Worthy of wrath and condemnation. We are who we are by God's grace. Let's stand in awe of God's magnificent plan. He is the originator, sustainer, and completer of everything ultimately. He is no one's debtor. And it's all about Him. To Him be the glory.