

Romans 11

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 February 2017

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0:00] Well if I was to explain everything in this chapter we'd be here till 4 or 5 tomorrow morning, tomorrow evening, this afternoon.! And I want to try and deal with the whole of chapter 11 in one chunk, which I think probably is madness.

We are dealing in Romans chapter 11 with the problem of the nation of Israel. The people of Israel who have rejected the offer of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you remember chapter 9? It's a number of weeks ago now, but chapter 9 shows us that God is in control of all things. And the fact that not all of the Jews believe that is God's doing, don't panic. And in chapter 10 he has shown us that human beings, they are responsible to God. Chapter 9, God is in control of all things, he is sovereign, he is free. Chapter 10, you as a human being are responsible.

And it spells it out in various ways, but the basic question of Romans 9 to 11 hasn't really been faced. Look at verse 1 of chapter 11.

[1:09] I ask them, has God rejected his people? That's the basic issue. That's the big issue in 9 to 11. That's the problem. Has God rejected the very people whom he has loved for approximately 2,000 years?

Are God's promises that he made to that nation in the Old Testament, are they going to be fulfilled? Or will they be forgotten? Is there apostasy? Have they fallen away? Is there rejection? Because they've rejected Christ. Is there rejection final and absolute? Is that it? Is that Israel?

They're away. They're away from God. They've forgotten him. Is that it? Is that their end? And these are questions of great practical importance because why they're so practical is because they teach us about the reliability of the Old Testament, of God's word for us.

And what Romans chapter 11 is saying is you can trust God's word. It is true. What will happen, what God promised will happen. Now I want to try and approach the chapter from three angles.

[2:16] I want to try and give you a positive explanation. And then I want to give you a problematic interpretation. And then thirdly, a practical application. You're going to need the outline. I'm not even sure I can do it without the outline.

So look at the outline with me. And Paul looks at the start of the chapter at this tragedy. The people of God have rejected God. They've rejected God and they've turned away from him.

And it is a tragedy. And yet in this chapter what the Apostle Paul does is he turns that round into something that is glowing with hope. He says it's not a tragedy.

It's glory. He pours a flood of light into a dark place. Now let me show you how he does that. He gives an explanation of the first two stages of the chapter.

Firstly, in verses 1 to 10, he says that even now, even now, Israel's rejection is partial. It's not complete. Not all Israel rejected Jesus Christ.

[3:15] Not all Israel has turned away. Not all of Israel has refused their God and their Saviour. He asked the question in verse 1.

I ask then, has God rejected his people? By no means. All his people? All his people? Has he rejected all of them? Every single one of them without exception?

Is that what's happened? By no means. He says, for I myself am an Israelite. A descendant of Abraham. A member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected all his people.

He writes to the church in Rome where many of the people that received this letter were Jews. And he says, I am a Jew. God has in Israel, amongst the people of Israel, a remnant.

A chosen remnant. An elect remnant. In that nation, there are people that are his. Not everyone in the nation. But there are people who are his.

[4 : 17] And that has always been God's practice. He always has had his people within Israel. He calls the prophet Elijah many centuries earlier.

When most of the nation had turned away from God. But not everyone had turned away from God. There were people, weren't there? Who had not trusted in Baal.

But they trusted in God. And they were the real Israel. They were the real people of God. And he says in verse 5 of the nation. In his day.

In their day. At this present time. There is a remnant chosen by grace. Don't say that all the Israelites have abandoned God. Don't say that they are all lost.

That they are all destructive. There are many in that nation who are God's people. Who trust him. And obey him. And worship him. And serve him.

[5 : 13] And are chosen by God's grace. And they are inevitably saved. Israel's rejection is partial. It's not complete. Not all of Israel has been cast out.

Now the rest of Israel is hardened. As is prophesied in the Old Testament. Look at verse 8. As it is written. God gave them a spirit of stupor. Eyes that would not see.

And ears that would not hear. Down to this very day. And that's always what's happened in Israel. Paul is saying. That's what's always happened. Do you remember Adam and Eve?

Their first two sons. Cain and Abel. Right at the beginning. There was those. There was the one who loved God. And the one who didn't love God. There was Jacob. And there was Esau.

One who loved God. And one who didn't love God. And that has been the pattern. Of the people of God. Of Israel. Right from then on. Right throughout history. And he says to these new keen Gentiles.

[6 : 13] Who are in the church in Rome. He says the rejection of Israel. Is no more complete in our day. Than it was in Elijah's day. Never think that all Israel is gone.

It's done with. That all of the people of God are lost. There's none left. The present situation is not unique. It's happened before. And it's happened always. That's his first argument.

In verses 1 to 10. Then in verses 11 to 24. He makes his second point. He says Israel's rejection is purposeful. And it's temporary. And God's dealing with the remnant.

Is satisfactory. He redeems them. He saves them. But what happens to the mass in Israel? They turn away. They don't believe. They are lost. But look at what Paul says in verse 11. So I ask.

Did they stumble. In order that they might fall. By no means. Rather through their trespass. Salvation has come. To the Gentiles.

[7 : 07] So as to make Israel jealous. Now 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?

Their rejection is temporary. It's not final. Here is the point. Their rejection.

Of the message of God. Of the Lord Jesus. Has a vital part to play. In God's purposes. For the world. Because of the Jewish rejection. Many Gentiles will come to hear the gospel.

And are converted. So do you see that? In the second half of verse 11. Rather through their trespass. Through their rejection. Through their rebellion. Salvation has come to the Gentiles.

Salvation has come to the Gentiles. There is a loving purpose. Look at verse 12. Their trespass means riches for the world. Riches for the world. Verse 13. I am an apostle.

[8 : 08] I am sent to the Gentiles. Verse 15. Can you see it? Their rejection means reconciliation to the world. Let me say.

I don't think the apostle Paul is writing these verses with a big smile on his face. I think he writes these verses with tears in his eyes. And grief in his heart about so many of his fellow Jews.

About his own race. But nonetheless he is saying God is bringing mercy to the whole world. And that is what has happened to Israel. Their rejection of the Lord Jesus has brought Gentile reconciliation.

Now how does this relate to our question? Says Paul. And here is the wonderful thing. And here is the thing that I think many of us Gentile Christians who are non-Jews forget today. He is saying that part of the purpose of Gentile conversions is to provoke the Jews to jealousy.

And to bring Israel to salvation. Gentiles are converted because Israel have turned away from Christ. And because the Gentiles are converted. That will lead many of the Israelites and many of the Jews to trust in Christ.

[9 : 24] Can you see that at the end of verse 11? It has come to the Gentiles so as to make Israel jealous. To make them envious. To stir them up spiritually. It is more clear in verses 13 and 14.

Now if I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles. I magnify my ministry. He was the saint one to the Gentiles. In order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous. And thus save some of them.

Do you see the way it works? I know it is hard work this afternoon. But stick with me. The Jews reject. And so the Gentiles are preached to. And many of them believe. And that stirs up the Jews to believe also.

And Paul's intense labour for the Gentiles. Far from being kind of an abandonment of his people. Is for the indirect purpose of bringing many of them to Christ. So verse 12.

How much more will their full inclusion be? Verse 15 speaks of their acceptance. And in verses 30 to 31. He speaks how they might be shown mercy.

[10:29] Verse 30. But just as you were at one time disobedient to God. But now have received mercy. Because of their disobedience. So they too.

Have now been disobedient. In order that by the mercy shown to you. They also may now receive mercy. Now do you see the pattern? That's the way it works. And that's a very sketchy view.

I know. I'm trying to give you a straightforward explanation of what Paul is saying. So that is the positive explanation. Now that leads me to the problematic interpretation.

Verses 25 and 26. And this is one of the great battlegrounds. Of the New Testament. Two verses. Over which. Hundreds of men have argued for hundreds of years.

Let me read to you in verse 25. Lest you be wise in your own sight. I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery. But there's a partial heartening that has come upon Israel. Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

[11:30] And in this way. All Israel. Will be saved. What does that mean? What do these words mean? And I'm not going to tell you what they mean.

Because I'm not absolutely sure. I hope that I can give you some help this lunch time. A partial heartening. Has come upon Israel. Until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

And in this way. All Israel will be saved. That's. What the verse is saying. There's two main suggestions. The first one. Is saying that Paul is referring to the future.

Which hasn't yet come. But it will come. Towards the end of the world. When Israel as a nation. Will be converted. After the fullness of the Gentiles has been gathered in.

And when the Gentiles have been gathered in. On that wonderful day. God will pour out his spirit upon Israel. And the people of Israel. And. And most of them.

[12:31] Will be converted. So you can say. All Israel. Will be saved. That's one understanding. The second understanding. Is. That it refers to the past. And the present.

And the future. And what Paul is saying here. Is that throughout the whole period of history. Jews will be converted. Alongside the Gentiles. And there will always be. Jews converted.

Throughout the world. It will always happen. And it will always continue. So that in this way. All Israel will be saved. And he means by that. All elect Israel. All of God's Israel.

So are you all the elect Jews. Or all the elect people. Jews and Gentiles. They. They are the two. Main. Understandings of this chapter. Of course they don't agree together.

One is that God in the future. Will redeem most of the people. Living in the land of Israel. Most of the Israelites. Living in the world. The second is that. Throughout history. All. Both Israelites and Gentiles.

[13:28] Will be converted. And the all Israel. Just refers to the people of God. Now what is the answer. Which one? I don't think you'll find the answer from me.

As much as I read on this. The first reason. I won't give you an answer this lunchtime. Is I'm not sure. There are not many things.

That I look at in the New Testament. And say I'm not sure. But this is one. The great preachers. And the wonderful commentators. And there are some amazing books on Romans.

Both argue for either side. Let me give you. Who is on. Team National Israel. The names are. Charles Hodge.

J.G. Boss. John Murray. Martin Lloyd-Jones. And James Philip. They are the men that I find most helpful. And I respect most on Romans. And they believe that the passage is speaking of a future conversion on the nation of Israel.

[14:25] I'm very tempted to go with them. They're heavyweights. But then who takes the other view? That it is all Israel. That it is in all the people of God. And then you have the Dutch masters.

You have Bavinck. Burkhoff. Hendrickson. Ridderbos. And all those men say that the verses from beginning to end of history are about the elect Jews and Gentiles.

Now. Who do you go with? I don't know. And I think if I was to be dogmatic. That would betray really what I should be this afternoon.

The second reason why I'm not going to tell you is this. And I think this is the controversial thing. I don't think it really matters. And I'm not downgrading the Bible.

I'm thinking about when the Apostle Peter speaks of Paul. And some of his letters and he says some of Paul's writings are hard to understand. And if the Apostle Peter can say there are some things of which I'm not sure.

[15 : 24] I think we can too. But those heavyweights. The Dutch masters. And the kind of Romans heavyweights. They are all agreed on one important thing.

And that's the main point. They are agreed for example that the gospel needs to be preached to all people. And that the Jews cannot be saved without the gospel.

Do you understand that? They believe rightly so. That the gospel must be preached to all people. And the Jews cannot be saved without hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And we are all agreed that many from both kinds of people will believe. Many Jews will believe praise God. And many Gentiles will believe. And we are agreed. From the teaching of the New Testament.

That there are no distinctions. Made among God's people. Neither Jew nor Greek. God does not say to the Jews. I will deal with you in a different way.

[16 : 19] I will save you in a different way. It's the same way. And after they are converted. Both Jews and Gentiles have to live in the same way.

And they obey the same law. And they believe the same Christ. And they serve the same God. And they worship the same Lord. There is no difference. So let's not magnify the difficulty.

And I certainly do not think we should let this difficulty become a defining mark of our church. Like it's been allowed to sometimes. And let's be honest. Discussions on this passage have done actually probably more harm than good.

And so that thirdly brings me to the practical implications. 2 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 says. All scriptures God breathe.

And it's profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness. That's the purpose of this passage. So how does it do that? Four things. First of all it gives us encouragement.

[17 : 19] It gives us encouragement. There is no doubt. That as you study the Bible. And as the people in the Rome church studied the Bible. They were staggered.

At the defection of the Jews. They were staggered at the losing of the Jews. For centuries the Jews. As God's people. Had known God's promises. And now there were Christians saying they are not God's people.

They have rejected God. And they have turned away from God. And Paul chooses the example of Elijah deliberately. In verse 3 you've got poor Elijah. The lonely faithful man.

Who says to God. I alone am left. I alone am left. And God says no you're not. First of all he says I've kept 7,000 men. Who've not bowed on the knee to Baal. You didn't even know they existed. You didn't know Elijah. You didn't know Elijah they were there. There were all these believers faithful to me. There were far more people faithful than you realised. And I think there are times when God says to us.

[18 : 23] There are far more Christians than you realise. There are far more believers than you realise. There are far more good churches than you realise. Last week I saw the reports of the General Synod.

It was so depressing. The bishops come up with a report. Which one person has said. Here I straddle I can do no more. Which I thought was quite interesting. It was an okay report.

And yet. General Synod rejected. The orthodox teaching of the Bible. The clear teaching of the Bible. And it's so easy isn't it.

To look at these mainline denominations. And the message that comes out of them. And be absolutely despairing. But I think we do need to remember don't we.

That in those churches. There is a remnant of God's people thankfully. And they may be in a mixed denomination. And we may disagree with them. But in many of those churches.

[19 : 27] There are men and women who have been saved by God's power. And so as God says here in verse 5. There are more Christians in this land than we might imagine.

There will be great surprises in heaven isn't it. I do think we will say. Because I never expected to see you here. They must have said to us. Secondly it's humbling.

Some of the Gentile believers were intending to boast about their salvation. And they looked down on the Jewish people. They looked down on these people that had thrown them away.

And the Gentiles were thinking. We are the important ones. The Jews are pathetic sinners. God has chosen us. And God has rejected them. And Paul reminds them. That they are no more than wild olive branches.

Grafted into a parent tree. Look at verse 17 to 18. But if some of the branches were broken off. And you although a wild olive tree. Were grafted in among the others.

[20 : 25] And now share the nourishing root of the olive tree. Do not be arrogant towards the branches. Don't be proud. If you remember. It's not you who support the root. But the root who supports you. You weren't great.

You weren't perfect. You weren't sinless. You weren't unwicked. God had mercy on you. And there's no reason to point the finger at a non-Christian. As here. God chose you. God loved you. God had mercy on you. And you are a Christian because of God. And in verse 20 he says. Do not become proud. But stand in awe. It's interesting isn't it.

It's shocking to us. Do not become proud. But fear. Fear. We are sinners saved by grace. We cannot look down on anybody else.

We don't pity people. We don't look down on them. And so God chose to save us. And the credit is his.

[21 : 21] And the glory is his. And thirdly there is warning. There is encouragement. There is humbling. And there is warning. And the fall of Israel is a dreadful example. They had so many privileges.

And God did so much for them. He delivered them from Egypt. He gave them the Ten Commandments. He brought them into the Promised Land. He guided them. He preserved them. He did it all. And they rejected him. And they turned away from him.

And it was terrible. Paul says verse 21. If God did not spare the natural branches. Neither will he spare you. And the Jews had religious privilege. They reached the stage where they didn't believe. Where they took it for granted. And we have great religious privileges. And apart from God's grace. We could not stand. But woe betide us.

If we don't believe. The future of any local church. Is not guaranteed. It depends on faith. It depends on our commitment.

[22 : 18] On our obedience. And he says in verse 20. So do not become proud. But fear. And when you see what happened to the Jews. And what can happen to churches.

We cannot become proud. And lastly worship. Verses 33 to 36. Paul has moved past the academic debates.

And he is beside himself with praise. As he thinks on the complexity of God. And as we think of God's salvation. He says to us. Oh the debt of the riches.

And wisdom. And knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgment. And how unscrutable his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord.

Or who has been his counsel. Or who has been given a gift in. That he might be repaid for from him. And through him. And to him. Are all things. To him be glory forever. He reaches the end.

[23 : 21] At this very complex discussion on. Election. And he says God is a wonderful wonderful God. And we cannot understand everything.

And we cannot explain everything. And we cannot defend everything. But we can look at our God. And we can know that he is all wise. And all perfect.

And all loving. And all that he does is holy. And well. And delightful. And there's a lot of things. That we don't have the answers. To. And that you don't understand. And I don't understand.

And so we should leave here. This lunch time. Not so much as thinkers. But as glad worshippers. And simply say to him. Be glory forever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.