

“Peculiar People”

Romans 11:25-32

September 13th, 2020

"You're in terrible shape," the doctor said to his patient. "You've got to do something about it. First, have your wife cook more nutritious meals. Stop working so hard. Inform your wife you're going to make a budget, and you both have to stick to it. Have her keep the kids occupied so you can rest. Unless there are some changes in your life, you'll be dead in a month."

"Doc," the patient said, "this would sound more believable coming from you. Could you please call my wife and give her those instructions?"

When the husband got home from the clinic, his wife rushed up to him. "I talked to your doctor today," she wailed. "Poor man, you've only got 30 days to live."

A man and his son lived in the mountains of rural Tennessee. One day, they went to a large city, and for the first time they stood in front of an elevator. The two of them watched as an elderly, haggard woman hobbled into the elevator, and the doors closed.

A few moments later the doors opened back up and a young, attractive woman marched smartly off the elevator. The father and son looked at each other, and Dad said, "Billy, go get mother!"

What these two illustrations have in common is change. *Change is all around us, isn't it?* This is especially so over the last six months since the corona virus first reared its ugly head in early spring. At times, it's **too much** change for me. Just because something is different from what it was in the past, it doesn't necessarily follow that this different thing – this change - is good.

Not all change is beneficial. As your pastor, I am knee deep in responding to changes the viral pandemic has forced upon us. One of the more significant changes is the capacity to participate in the worship service away from the church building. We didn't have that capability before March. For some, this is a preferable option, while for others it is a necessary one because of age, health or condition. I ponder what it may translate into for us long term. A recent article asks what the local church will look like a year from now. Among the changes was the estimate that 20% of those who attended worship in-person before the pandemic will not return to the church. For Trinity Church, that percentage would be about 30 people!

But, weary warriors, here is our Hope – though things seem to change constantly around us, God does not change. He is the unchanging God, which means He is always good, and His ways are always good. Because God is faithful and good, we do not have anything to fear.

This is the second to last sermon from **Romans Chapter 11** for this sermon series we began together the first Sunday of September 2019, 53 weeks ago. Over the last couple of months, chapters 9-11 of Romans have opened to us some of the deeper doctrines of the Christian faith. And today's verses are certainly no exception.

Romans 11:25-32:

²⁵ For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

“The Deliverer will come out of Zion,
And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
²⁷ For this is My covenant with them,
When I take away their sins.”

²⁸ Concerning the gospel *they are* enemies for your sake, but concerning the election *they are* beloved for the sake of the fathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God *are irrevocable*. ³⁰ For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹ even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³² For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.”

Verse 25 makes reference to a “mystery.” A “mystery” - in the biblical sense - is a truth that would not have been known if God had not revealed it. Paul doesn’t want his readers to be bewildered by what God was working out with believing Jews and Gentiles. Paul reveals this mystery to Gentile brothers to help them from becoming conceited (“wise in their own opinion”). That mysterious truth is that a large number of the Jews were blinded – hardened – but their blindness/hardening would not be permanent.

This would be the case for the Jews until “the fullness of the Gentiles” had come in. That would mean the *full number* of Gentiles God had purposed to save. The late Dr. RC Sproul writes here, “Presumably there is a point in (time) where God’s extension of His salvific call to the Gentiles will reach its saturation point, after which God’s relationship to ethnic Israel will change.” (Sproul, 383)

We come now to what could be the most controversial verse in the entire book of Romans at the beginning of verse 26 – “And so, all Israel will be saved...”

The word “Israel” in verses 25 and 26 refers to the same group of people in each of those verses. “Israel” refers to ethnic Israel in contrast to the Gentiles. It refers to the Jews as a body. For sure, “if Paul (were to be) referring (here) to spiritual Israel, would be departing from the way he uses the term ‘Israel’ here and in the preceding 3 chapters. Since **Romans Chapter 8** Paul has been talking about ethnic Israel.” (Sproul, 387) God’s plan for Israel hasn’t yet run its course; there is a yet future movement of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of Jewish people; many will profess saving faith in Christ and, therefore, become believers.

Note the word “all” in verse 26, as in “*all* Israel will be saved.” “All” probably does not refer to every Jew without exception, but Israel as a whole. Last Sunday’s special music was the hymn “When We All Get to Heaven.” *Do all people go to heaven after they die?* No, they do not. Only the souls of those who die trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation from their sins go to heaven. Sadly, not everyone goes to everlasting glory when his/her life comes to an end this

side of eternity. Those outside of Christ are not spared. Neither Jew nor Gentile qualifies for heaven based on his physical ancestry or ethnic origin. We are only saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone. He is the One who lived for you, who died for you, who was raised from the dead for you, and presently reigns in glory for you!

The second half of verse 26 refers to **Jesus**. He is the Deliverer that would come out of Zion. Jesus is also the One "who would turn away ungodliness from Jacob." These words come from Isaiah's prophecy in the Old Testament, specifically **Isaiah 59:21** and **Isaiah 27:9**. Interestingly, both verses mention "Jacob." But, Jacob the forefather would be dead at the time of the Redeemer's appearing. It is interesting to explore Jacob, as mentioned here, in more detail.

The story of Jacob is told in the Bible's first book, Genesis, which we studied on Sunday mornings some time ago. In **Genesis Chapter 32**, Jacob wrestles with the angel of the Lord. In the midst of their wrestling each other, the Angel asks Jacob his name, to which he replied, "Jacob." In verse 28, the angel utters these words, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." Israel here means 'Prince with God.'

As we get to the latter chapters in Genesis, the names Jacob and Israel are used synonymously. Consider a couple of examples:

- **Genesis 48:2**, "And Jacob was told, 'Look, your son Joseph is coming to you'; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed.
- **Genesis 49:33**, "And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people." As **Genesis Chapter 50** opens, we see Joseph weeping over his father and instructing the doctors to embalm him. And **Genesis 50:2** says the doctors "embalmed Israel."

Though he is one of the patriarchs of the Christian faith (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for instance), Jacob could act like a scoundrel. His name means "supplanter" or "deceiver." Israel – he who is the Prince with God - is a much more positive name!

As we come to verse 28 of today's text, the pronoun "they" refers to Israel. "Israel" are enemies and "Israel" is beloved. The great Princeton theologian Charles Hodge notes, "The Jews were now, as far as the gospel was concerned, regarded and treated as enemies, for the benefit of the Gentiles; but, in reference to the election, they were still regarded the peculiar people of God, on account of their connection with the patriarchs." (Maurice Roberts, *Banner of Truth* magazine, Nov 1966, pg. 1)

Then in verse 29, we see that God is unchanging when it comes to His gifts and His calling. He doesn't renege on his promises or benefits! They are irrevocable, meaning they cannot be appealed or annulled. They stand because God stands!

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who lived more than 2,600 year ago, once said, “It is impossible to step into the same river twice.” His point is what I said at the beginning of this message – life is in a state of constant change. Heraclitus pondered that although you can step into a river once, step out, and then step back in a second time, by the time you have stepped back in, the water has flowed on and the river is no longer the same. It is a different river.

The last 3 verses, 30-32, emphasize disobedience and mercy. ³⁰For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³²For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.”

“Disobedience” or “disobedient” are used 4 times in these 3 verses – twice in verse 30, once in verse 31, and once in verse 32. The word “mercy” is also used 4 times in these 3 verses – once in verse 30, two in verse 31, and once in verse 32. Our disobedience and God’s mercy are a combination that works out for our eternal good.

Israel’s disobedience was for our good because God was merciful to spare us. Gentile disobedience was for the good of Jewish people because God is merciful to spare them.

As we look at the landscape of the Bible, we realize there are 3 great epochs of salvation:

1 – God called the Jews and excluded the Gentiles. This was the case from the time of Abraham to Jesus Christ;

2 – God called the Gentiles to the exclusion of the Jewish nation, which began at Pentecost to some future time (the fullness of the Gentiles);

3 – Jews and Gentiles are equally favored by God in the Church of the New Testament age. This will mean removing the blindness for the Jews.

So, just 4 verses remain yet to be studied. Next Sunday, Lord willing, we’ll study verses 33-36 of Romans Chapter 11. What a tremendous benediction those verses are!

So, dear one, if you are a believer in Christ, it’s because you’re either a believing Jew or a believing Gentile – most of us are the latter sort. We presently await the time when the fullness of the Gentiles are welcomed into the kingdom of God. There are presently very few Jews who believe that Jesus Christ is God’s Redeemer, our Savior. One of them I knew from our time in Alabama. As I recall, he owned a car dealership in Montgomery. His name was Larry Israel, and He met Jesus when he was reading **Isaiah Chapter 53**, and realized it was speaking of Jesus. Consider a few of them:

“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him (Jesus); He has put *Him* (Jesus) to grief.

When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days,
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He (Jesus) shall bear their iniquities.
¹²Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong,
Because He (Jesus) poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors,
And (Jesus) bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”