THAT HE MAY HAVE MERCY ON THEM ALL

Romans 11:1-36

Key Verse: 32

“For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”

In the previous passage, we learned that **“The word is near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart.” “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believes in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved.”** Amen! However, the Israelites was indifferent to the word of God which was near them. They were disobedient and obstinate people. In today’s passage, Paul deals with their unbelief. Paul expounds the mystery that God works out salvation through the remnant in His mercy. May we learn the way How God works in any situation and turn our eyes to the God of hope through this passage.

1.God works through His remnant (1-10)

In verse 1, Paul started with a question, **“Did God reject his people?”** He answered, **“By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.”** God did not reject his people.Paul presented evidence beginning with himself. He was the least likely person to be saved by God because he was persecuting the church of Jesus with violence. But God saved him by His grace and appointed him as a chosen instrument for world salvation.

Verse 2b says, **“Don’t you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah- how he appealed to God against Israel.”** The time of Elijah was one of the darkest times in Israel’s history. King Ahab did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any other kings before him. He married Jezebel, a daughter of king of Sidonians who introduced an idol worship of Baal. Prophet Elijah challenged the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel to demonstrate who the true and living God was. God answered Elijah’s prayer dramatically by sending fire from heaven and revealed Himself as the true God. Then Elijah put to death 450 Baal prophets. Then the wicked queen, Jezebel threatened to kill Elijah that he became fearful and fled to Mount Horeb. There, he appealed to God against Israel in despair: **“Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars, I am the only one left and they are trying to kill me.”**

What was God’s answer?Verse 4b says, **“I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”**

Elijah thought that he alone was carrying the burden of God’s mission on his shoulders all by himself. But God was doing his work by keeping his remnants like burning lamp. Remnant is the small piece of cloth left over when the whole cloth has been used up. Remnant also means people who are left in a community after it undergoes a catastrophe.

Isaiah chapter 11:11a says, **“In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, Egypt, Cush, Babylon…”** God promised to bring back remnants one day from Babylonian captivity to the promised land. God had spared a remnant to serve those times with the word of God. God reserved the remnant to rebuild the work of God. They were so precious in the sight of God. They were God’s hope for the salvation history. God always works through a remnant. While world history tosses and turns like the surface waves, God’s work flows steadily through his remnant, like the undercurrent of the ocean. **Verse 5 says, “So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.”** Paul used the phrase, “**at the present time**.” In Elijah’s time, in Paul’s time and in our time, there is always a remnant chosen by grace. It is God’s amazing grace to be included in his remnant.

Verse 7 says, **“What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened.”** In this verse, the word, “hardened” has the same meaning as a “callus.” Just as a callus can grow on the hand, a callus can grow on the heart. Rejection of love results in the hardening of the heart. Deuteronomy 29 tells how God loved Israel and how she rejected that love. Hardening heart has serious consequences. They become spiritually blind and deaf.

In Psalm 69, David pronounced a curse on those who rejected him, God’s chosen king. Jesus is God’s chosen one. To reject Jesus is to reject God and bring hardness and curse upon themselves. The word “table” in verse 9 is symbolized as abundant blessing of God. Their table refers to their feast of spiritual nourishment through God’s word. God gave them Jesus to save them from their sins as the table of grace. In John 6:35, Jesus said, **“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”** But when they rejected the Messiah, their source of nourishment became a source of snare and trap.

I had an opportunity to converse with one of our patients from Iraq. She was an Assyrian Christian from ancient city, Nineveh showing her cross mark on the skin of her forearm. She said that her ancestors fled to neighboring countries like Syria, Jordan, Turkey and Iran escaping from persecution, Muslim fundamentalist. They were massacred by Turks and Kurds in early 20 centuries. When safety and freedom of religion was restored in Iraq, these scattered Christians returned to their country and formed a Christian community. Although Assyrian empire ended in BC 612, some of their descendants became remnants of faith by believing in Jesus in the early century according to Neneveh.com. It seems like the least place and country to find out Christians to my eyes, however, there are still remnant, small, but faithful people who kept their faith throughout the ages.

Who are the remnants at the present time? God has his people everywhere even though we cannot detect them. They are those who made personal decisions to live for the glory of God. They are those who are ready to obey God. God works through people who accept and believe in his words even if the number is small. Remnant can be an individual, family and small community. God has reserved his remnant on our campuses, in our communities and our nation. The Lord wants us to join in the work of finding them and sharing his word with them. May we recognize ourselves as the remnant of God by holding on to his covenant promises. No matter how dark our times may be, let us remain as a part of God’s remnant that God may use us and our community to rebuild the work of God.

2.God has hope for Israel out of his mercy (11-36)

Look at verse 11. **“Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.”** Israel had only stumbled, not fallen permanently. In the time of blessing, the Israelites enjoyed only the milk and honey in the promised land, but totally forgot God’s purpose for world salvation.

Whenever apostle Paul entered cities in his missionary journeys in minor Asia, he began preaching the gospel in the Jewish synagogues. But most of the Jews rejected his message. So he turned to the Gentile who were glad and honored the word of the Lord. During Paul’s time, Gentile churches sprang up in Philippi, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus and even in Rome. The Gentiles became the instruments of spreading God’s grace to the world. To Paul, God’s blessing for his people is like mighty water held behind a reservoir dam. It is always high against the bank. What did God do with the blessing? He opened the dam and irrigated his blessing to the Gentiles.

Verses 13-14 say, **“I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.”** God had a hidden reason for pouring his blessing upon the Gentiles, it was to make Israel envious. The failure of Jews became an open door to the Gentile world to come to God. If the Israelites’ rejection brought reconciliation to the Gentiles, how much greater blessing would their acceptance bring to the whole world! Paul taught the same truth by using two metaphors: the dough and the root. Verse 16 says, **“If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.”** When the Jews prepared dough, they offered the first part of it to God. When they did so, the whole lump of dough became holy.

Look at verse 17. **“If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root.”** The olive and the vine trees are two common crops in Palestine. The wild olive tree is small and worthless unless its shoot is grafted into a good olive tree. Grafting is a technique that vegetatively joins two plants into one. Grafted plants use the roots and the bottom portion of one plant- rootstock and attach it to a tender shoot- scion of another plant from which it receives sap.

Paul’s warning comes in verses 17-24. Some of the branches in verse 17 refers to the unbelieving Jews and wild olive shoots refer to the Gentiles. Wild olive shoots are uncultivated and do not receive proper nourishment. However, when the Jews became like broken branches, the Gentiles were grafted in, took root and began to enjoy the nourishing sap from the cultivated olive tree. They grew and bore fruit. The Gentile believers received great blessing through the gospel. Paul warns the Gentiles: **“Do not be arrogant but tremble.”** If Gentile believers did not keep their faith, they would not be spared either. So they should be humble in fear.

The nourishing sap is a lifeline for the branches to grow and bear fruits. Without the nourishing sap, the branches will be dry and be withered and be dead soon. It provides the nutrition to all the branches. Jesus is our nourishing sap. Jesus said in John 15:5, **“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit, apart from me you can do nothing.”** At the end of verse 17, “the olive root” refers to the root of Jesse(Isaiah 11:10) and to the root of David who is the Son of Man, Jesus. Jesus is holy and so are those who belong to him. He feeds us with the word of life. He nourishes our souls. The source of salvation comes from Jesus. We need to be connected to Jesus, the cultivated olive tree through accepting his word.

Verse 22 says, **“Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.”** Gentiles should not take God’s grace for granted. Moreover, they should realize that God can easily graft the Israelites back into his olive tree when they believe in Jesus. The Jews were broken off because of their unbelief. The Gentiles stood by faith. We began our pilgrims by faith. We must continue by faith. We are included in God’s family by God’s grace alone. If the Jews do not persist in their unbelief, they will be grafted in again for God is able to do it. God longs for the Jews to repent and turn from their pride and hardness and accept Jesus as their Savior. Then they will be surely grafted in again. It will be very natural for the natural branches to be grafted into their own olive tree.

Verse 25 says, **“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”** Even though his people had failed down through the ages, God will surely bring them back. During the time of Israel’s hardening, God opened widely the door of salvation to the Gentiles so the full number can come in. It points to a widespread acceptance of the gospel by the whole nation Israel. This will be fulfilled through Jesus who takes away their sins.

In regard to the gospel, unbelieving Israel had become God’s enemy for the sake of the Gentiles. But in regard to election, there is God’s calling and choosing, Israel is loved on account of the patriarchs. God chose the patriarchs by his grace and gave them his covenant promises which extends to their descendants. God did not cancel his covenant promises to the descendants of Israel. He still loves Israel out of his great faithfulness. That is why Paul says, **“for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.”**

Look at verses 30-32. **“Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”**

Here, we find the word, “**mercy**” 4 times. God extends his mercy to all kinds of disobedient people. God is full of mercy and carries out his salvation work based on his mercy. In light of God’s great mercy, even the hardened Israelites have hope and any wretched sinner has hope. Many of us have concerned about the spiritual condition of our bible students, children, family members and nation. Sometimes, we lose hope for them. But when we know God’s great mercy, our hearts are flooded with hope. God is merciful toward disobedient and rebellious people.

When Paul discovered how powerfully God has been working through his mercy, he burst forth into a song of praise to God. He exclaimed, **“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”** God’s wisdom and knowledge are beyond human comprehension. God’s ways are inscrutable. God longs to pour out his mercy and forgiveness on all people. God’s hope for Israel is indeed the hope of God which cannot be found anywhere else except in God. May we seek God’s mercy on all people around us and pray for their salvation through the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. Let have the hope for perishing souls because of the hope of God and His great mercy.