

**May 10, 2020**

**Speaker:** Eric Naus **Series:** This I Believe – The Book of Romans

**Passage:** Romans 11:1-36

Community Group Questions: “The Marvel of God’s Mercy”

Background: In this passage, Paul continues to wrestle with the question: “Why are so many Israelites rejecting the gospel? Have God’s promises to Israel failed?” In Romans 9 and 10, Paul has wrestled with the question from the perspective of both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Now in Romans 11, Paul comes back to divine sovereignty, explaining that God continues to preserve a “remnant” within Israel, and one day, “all Israel” will be saved and brought back together with Gentile believers into the one true people of God in Christ. In light of this background, read Romans 11:1-36 aloud as a group, and then work through the following questions.

1. According to 11:1-10, even though it might appear as though God has rejected Israel, in fact, he has been sovereignly saving and preserving a “remnant” of Israelites, those God has “foreknown” before the foundation of the world (see Romans 8:29). Paul holds himself up as an example of this, he points to the remnant of believers in Elijah’s day, and he uses Scripture to support the idea that God would save his “elect” among Israel, even while “hardening” the rest. Paul finds deep encouragement from the doctrine of predestination! Why should this idea, that God has sovereignly chosen his people for salvation in the depths of eternity past, provide us with great encouragement and confidence when our evangelism seems to be failing? In your opinion, why did God reveal the doctrine of predestination to us at all? (see vs. 5-6 for ideas).
2. In verses 11-32, Paul explains a historical pattern by which God is saving his people. The pattern is this: the gospel was first preached to the Jews who have largely rejected the message (though a remnant is being saved). As a result of Jewish rejection, the gospel has gone out to the Gentiles, who are now coming to Christ in droves (see 11:11-12, 15, 19, 25). At some point in the future, Gentile conversion will make Israel “jealous” (see 11:11, 14, 10:19) of these blessings, and “all Israel” will turn to Jesus and be saved (see 11:12, 14-15, 24, 25-26)! This massive revival among ethnic Israelites will apparently occur in close proximity to the return of Christ (see vs. 15 where their acceptance means “life from the dead” and vs. 26 where Paul’s quote seems to describe Jesus’ return from heavenly Zion). This pattern of salvation is meant to highlight God’s faithfulness (see vs. 29) and mercy (see vv. 30-32). What are the implications of this teaching for how we pray for and think about the evangelization of the Jewish people all around the world? What does this teaching highlight about the character of God? How does this chapter’s view of the future inspire you to worship God even more wholeheartedly?
3. In verses 17-24, Paul uses the example of an olive tree as a metaphor for the people of God. The “roots” of the tree represent God’s Old Covenant people, together with the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.), the promises, the history, and privileges of Israel as a people (see 9:3-5). The branches of this tree include Jewish believers, who remain in the tree due to their faith in Christ. Other branches were “broken off” – they represent Jews who rejected Christ, and therefore have been broken off of the true people of

God. Other branches have been “grafted in” to the tree. These branches represent the Gentiles who have come into the people of God through faith in Christ. Paul predicts a coming day when Israelites will be grafted back into their natural tree through faith in Jesus. How does this metaphor of the Olive Tree promote the idea that there is really only one true people of God, with one way of salvation in Christ, one faith, one history, one set of promises, and one future? How does this same metaphor celebrate “diversity” within unity? In other words, how does Christianity preserve cultural distinctiveness, while at the same time, celebrating our oneness in Christ? In your opinion, how are Christians uniquely equipped to address issues of racial tension in our day? Finally, how can we as a church do a better job of celebrating ethnic and cultural distinctions among our members, while at the same time promoting our unity in the Lord?

4. In verses 33-36, Paul ends his discussion of Romans 9-11 with a word of grateful praise to our awesome and sovereign God. Why should our theology always lead us to doxology (praise)? What has gone wrong when theology fails to lead us to worship and praise?

Prayer suggestion: In addition to praying for one another’s needs, spend time giving God praise for his sovereignty, faithfulness, mercy, and wisdom.